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Hapless Jalpaiguri residents await relief after storm

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Extreme heat to scorch India during polls

10 to 20 days of heatwave are expected in K'taka, Guj, M'rashtra, Rajasthan, MP & Odisha

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

India is set to experience extreme heat during the April to June period.

The central and the western peninsular parts expected to face the worst impact, the IMD said on Monday as the India Meteorological Department (IMD) Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said the anticipated increase in outdoor activities during the 2024 general elections could heighten public vulnerability to heatwaves. Above-normal heatwave days are likely over most parts in the plains during April-June.

Gujarat, central Maharashtra, north Karnataka, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, north Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh are likely to experience the worst impact of heatwaves.

Ten to 20 days of heatwave are expected in different parts of the country against a normal of four to eight days, he added.

With greater exposure, there's an elevated risk of heatwave-related health issues among the electorate and election staff.

Normal to below-normal maximum temperatures are likely over some parts of the western Himalayan region, northeastern states and north Odisha, he said.

Though El Nino conditions -- the periodic warming of waters in the central Pacific Ocean -- are weakening, these will continue during April and May, he said.

The prevailing El Nino conditions fuelled record temperatures and extreme events the world over, with 2023 being the warmest on record. El Nino is associated with unusually dry and warm conditions over southeast Asia.

La Nina conditions -- associated with bountiful monsoon rain in India -- are likely to set in by the second half of the monsoon, he added. The Met office said above-normal maximum temperatures are likely over most parts of the country in April, with a high probability over central south India.

The IMD said the country is "most likely" to gauge normal rainfall (88-112 per cent of the long-period average of 39.2 mm) in April.

An official from the Union health ministry said an advisory has been issued to states with respect to mass gatherings, based on the learnings from an extreme heat-related incident in Navi Mumbai last year. —*PTI*

With greater exposure, there's an elevated risk of heatwave-related health issues **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

MNREGA labourer dies while working due to heatstroke in K'taka

KALABURAGI, 1 APRIL

A MNREGA labourer, Sharanappa Samagara, collapsed and died in the Dannoor village of Aland Taluk, Kalaburagi district, due to suspected heatstroke or heart attack. The incident has sparked speculation over whether Sharanappa succumbed to the scorching heat or a medical emergency. A case has been registered at the Narona police station in Kalaburagi district, awaiting a post-mortem report to ascertain the exact cause of death. The body was handed over to family members and cremated on Monday. The death occurred during a heatwave sweeping across Karnataka. —*Salar News*

Monster waves swallow villages near T'puram

T'PURAM, 1 APRIL

Ancy and her seven family members were sleeping after attending the Easter mass when a monster wave flooded her home in Pozhiyoor near Poovar in Thiruvananthapuram.

Everything that they had prepared for a feast on Easter and whatever little they had inside their house were washed away as sea water entered the house on Sunday.

Coastal communities in Thiruvananthapuram and many other coastal districts of Kerala were shocked by a sudden, rough sea on Sunday.

"It was like a tsunami. We had no warnings from the authorities, and everything we had had gone with the water," a teary-eyed Ancy told PTI as the monstrous waves continued to swallow the half-damaged sea wall bordering her house.

More than 100 families had their houses damaged in Pozhiyoor, some of them losing them permanently, and huge losses occurred to fishermen as the waves damaged their boats and fishing nets.

The coastal village of Pozhiyoor looked like a graveyard, with cement bricks and waste from damaged houses strewn all around. The famous tourism spot, Poovar, and nearby areas were completely under water on Sunday.

"Nobody has come to help us. This is election time, and they will come asking for votes," a local fisherman who was fuming at the neglect of the authorities said.

"We have opened one camp at the government school, and we have had 24 families stay here since yesterday," Geetha Suresh said. The rough sea and monstrous waves are expected to continue till 4 April. —*PTI*

Houses damaged as rain, storm lash Mizoram

AIZAWL, 1 APRIL

Several houses and churches have been damaged in Mizoram as heavy rain accompanied with hail lashed parts of the north-eastern state, officials said Monday. More than 300 houses were damaged by hail at Zohmun and Palsang villages in Aizawl district on Sunday night, they said. A church at Lungtan village in Champhai district collapsed and another at Sialsuk in Aizawl also suffered damages, the officials said. There were, however, no reports of any injury or death so far. District officials are still collecting information added. —*PTI*

53,000 hit after thunderstorm in Assam

GUWAHATI, 1 APRIL

Four people were killed and nearly 53,000 people affected as a thunderstorm wreaked havoc in Assam, officials said on Monday.

A four-year-old child died and two people went missing after a boat capsized in the Brahmaputra in South Salmara-Mankachar district on Sunday night, while one each died in Cachar, West Karbi Anglong and Udalguri in storm and lightning related accidents.The storm accompanied by a downpour lashed several parts of the state on Sunday evening, uprooting trees and electric poles and damaging houses, Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) CEO Gyanendra Dev Tripathi said.

The ASDMA is also sending drones with pilots for surveillance during the operation, the CEO said. He said there were 15 passengers on the boat, and the rest of them swam to safety with the help of locals. In a bulletin, ASDMA said the storm affected 919 villages in 22 districts. A total of 14,633 houses were either partially or fully damaged.

It also said that over 10 hectares of cropland have been damaged. Huts, schools, shops, Anganwadi centres and other institutions have been damaged across the state, while scores of vehicles were damaged when trees fell on them. An official said that hundreds of visitors were stranded inside Garbhanga Reserve Forest near Guwahati till the early hours as the entire road was blocked by uprooted trees. —*PTI*

Man allegedly murders 2 sons, hangs self in Kolar

KOLAR, 1 APRIL

A middle aged man allegedly killed his two sons and hanged himself at Sigehalli village in Srinivaspur around Sunday midnight. The deceased are Narayanaswamy, 45, Pavan, 14, and Nithin, 12. Narayanaswamy and his wife—who were married for 16 years—had frequent quarrels. On Sunda, he reportedly took her wife to her father's house in Kolar where the couple had fought. He reportedly assaulted her and returned home. When the children were asleep, he allegedly tied a rope around their neck and strangled them. —*Salar News*

SC refuses to stay Hindu prayers in Gyanvapi mosque

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to stay the Hindu prayers in the southern cellar of the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi even as it ordered a "status quo" on the religious observances by both the Hindu and Muslim sides inside the mosque premises.

The court was hearing a fresh plea of the Gyanvapi mosque management committee against an Allahabad High Court decision upholding a lower court's order allowing Hindu prayers in the southern cellar of the mosque. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

US bridge collapse: 20 Indians still trapped on ship

NEW YORK, 1 APRIL

The Indian crew onboard a crippled container vessel that collided against a key bridge in Baltimore last week is "healthy", according to a non-profit organisation that has been in touch with the personnel. The 2.6km-long, four-lane bridge over the Patapsco River in Baltimore, came crashing down after the ship collided against it in the early hours of 26 March. The 21 crew members of Dali, of which 20 are Indians, are still onboard the crippled cargo ship nearly a week after the collision. —*PTI*

IN JAIL TILL 15 APRIL

Kejri called AAP national treasurer 'confused': ED

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal called his party's National Treasurer "confused" when he was confronted with his statement on issues related to the affairs of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Enforcement Directorate (ED) claimed before a court on Monday.

The special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court of Judge Kaveri Baweja sent the 55-year-old Kejriwal, also the National Convener of AAP, to judicial custody till 15 April in connection with the money laundering probe linked to alleged irregularities in the Delhi excise policy for 2021-22, which was later scrapped.

ED also alleged that Kejriwal, during his questioning, said AAP Communication in-charge Vijay Nair "did not report to him" but to his cabinet colleagues Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj and that his interaction with Nair was "limited".

ED claimed that Kejriwal first told it that ND Gupta, also a Rajya Sabha member of the AAP, is an "active member of the party and is a member of the PAC and has knowledge of the party functioning but when confronted with the statement of Gupta wherein he (Gupta) reveals that the national convenor takes such decisions, Kejriwal calls the National Treasurer confused".

The agency has alleged earlier that Nair, on behalf of AAP leaders, has received kickbacks to the tune of Rs 100 crore from the 'south group' liquor lobby that allegedly involves BRS leader K Kavitha and others.

It asked the court not to release Kejriwal as he was "highly influential and there was every likelihood that he would "influence the witnesses and tamper with the evidence".

The excise case pertains to alleged corruption and money laundering in formulating and executing the Delhi government's now-scrapped excise policy for 2021-22.

Delhi Lieutenant Governor had VK Saxena recommended a CBI probe into the alleged irregularities in the formulation and implementation of the liquor policy. —*PTI*

Arvind Kejriwal **PHOTO: PTI**

- The agency has alleged earlier that Nair, on behalf of AAP leaders, has received kickbacks to the tune of Rs 100 crore from the 'south group' liquor lobby that allegedly involves BRS leader K Kavitha and others. It asked the court not to release Kejriwal as he was "highly influential and there was every likelihood.

K'taka slashes power tariff by ₹1.1 per unit

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

Ahead of Lok Sabha elections, Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC) reduced the power tariff by Rs 1.10 per unit for 2024- 25.

This Is the first decrease in electricity tariffs in State in 15 years.

The new prices have come into effect from 1 April. This reduction will benefits domestic consumers who utilise more than 100 units per month, as they now have to only pay Rs 5.90 per unit, down from the previous Rs 7 per unit.

In 2022, the Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC) announced a power tariff revision for the year 2022-23. This revision included an increase in energy charges by 5p per unit and raised fixed charges by Rs 10 to Rs 30 per kilowatt. As a result, experts estimate that an average household in Bengaluru will face an additional expense of at least Rs 85 per month on their electricity bills due to the hike. There will be no changes for those getting zero bills under the Gruha Jyothi scheme. —*Salar News*

PHOTO: PTI

China renames 30 places in Arunachal in 4th list

BEIJING, 1 APRIL

China has released a fourth list of 30 new names of various places in Arunachal Pradesh amid Beijing's stepped-up assertions in recent weeks to re-emphasise its claim over the Indian state.

India has been rejecting China renaming places in Arunachal Pradesh, asserting that the state is an integral part of the country and assigning "invented" names does not alter this reality.

The Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs released the fourth list of standardised geographical names in Zangnan, the Chinese name for Arunachal Pradesh which Beijing claims as part of south Tibet, state-run Global Times reported on Sunday.

The official website of the ministry posted 30 additional names for the region.

Set to take effect from 1 May, the implementation measures stipulate in Article 13 that "place names in foreign languages that may harm China's territorial claims and sovereignty rights shall not be directly quoted or translated without authorisation," the report said.

The Chinese Civil Affairs Ministry released the first list of the standardised names of six places in Zangnan was released in 2017, while the second list of 15 places was issued in 2021 followed by another list with names for 11 places in 2023.

The recent statements by China to reassert its claims over the state started with Beijing lodging a diplomatic protest with India over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Arunachal Pradesh, where he dedicated to the nation the Sela Tunnel built at an altitude of 13,000 feet in Arunachal Pradesh. —*PTI*

AFTER LONG DELAYS

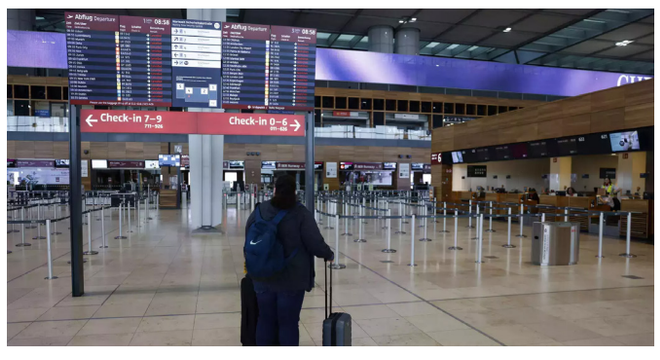
Now, flyers can exit via departure gates

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Aviation security watchdog Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) has issued new guidelines that will allow exit of passengers from an aircraft through an airport departure gate in case there is a long delay in operating the flight after boarding.

The latest directive from BCAS comes against the backdrop of rising instances of congestion and flight delays, resulting in passengers getting stuck in aircraft after boarding for long hours.

BCAS Director General Zulfiquar Hasan on Monday said the guidelines were issued to airlines and airport operators on 30 March and are now in force. The guidelines will help in ensuring "less harassment" for passengers and they would not have to keep sitting inside an aircraft for long hours after boarding, he said.



The aviation security watchdog will also put in place smart security lanes for better passengers experiences at the airports **PHOTO: PTI**

Airport operators have to make arrangements for the infrastructure, including for screening, for implementing the guidelines," Hasan said and added that a decision on deboarding the passengers will be taken by airlines and security agencies concerned.

On 17 January, BCAS had slapped fines totalling Rs 1.80 crore on IndiGo and Mumbai airport operator MIAL over the incident of passengers having food on the airport tarmac. A penalty of Rs 1.20 crore has been imposed on IndiGo, while the fine on MIAL is Rs 60 lakh. Earlier, Hasan said congestion at airports is "unwelcome" and that the agency has developed optimum standards and tools to tackle the issue. The aviation security watchdog will also put in place smart security lanes as part of efforts to ensure better experience for passengers at the airports. —*PTI*

PHOTO: FB/NINGAPPA

Ex-MLA Ningappa to return to JD(S) ahead of LS polls

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

Former MLA of Tumakuru Rural Assembly Constituency H Ningappa will join JD(S) on Tuesday morning, said former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy. Notably, Ningappa was earlier in JD(S) but resigned from the party in November 2022 and joined Congress. So this will be a homecoming for the senior leader. Ningappa said that he is happy that he is returning to the party. He also said that he had a meeting with JDS chief and former prime minister HD Deve Gowda. Ningappa, along with his supporters, will join the party at a programme to be held at the state office of JD(S) at 10.30 am on Tuesday. In contrast to the above developments, JD(S)'s leader, Najma Nazeer Chikkanerale, joined Congress on Saturday. "Najma Nazeer Chikkanerale, the young leader who resigned from the JD (S) and has today officially joined Congress along with her supporters," Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said in a post on X. Chikkanerale, the former working president of JD(S)'s women's wing, joined the party as a worker at the age of 22 and quickly rose through the ranks. She became the state-level media spokesperson.

—ANI

BMRCL, NGO ally to promote menstrual hygiene

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) has collaborated with Sakriya Charitable Trust to raise awareness about menstrual hygiene management by offering free space for a campaign at Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Metro Station. The initiative, launched on 1 April, 2024, uses visuals and messages to educate the public about women's health and hygiene. Sakriya Charitable Trust, an NGO led by social activist Anitha Roa, spearheads efforts to promote menstrual hygiene in rural and urban areas, including schools.

—Salar News

2 bikers arrested for harassing City woman in car

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

Two bikers who harassed a woman, 36, in a car last night on the Madiwala-Koramangala road were arrested, police said on Monday. Police said that they arrested Tejas, 25, and Jagannath, 24, while their third accomplice Kannan is still at large, sources said. The woman employed at St John's Hospital, was returning to her residence in Begur on Sunday. Near Koramangala, she noticed three individuals on a scooter trailing closely behind her vehicle. Sensing trouble, the woman dialled emergency services 112 and reported the situation. She was followed by the trio till Madiwala.

—Salar News with Agencies

New software to prevent fake emission test

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

In a bid to tackle the rising levels of air pollution caused by vehicles, State Transport Department has introduced a new system to prevent the issuance of fake Pollution Under Control (PUC) certificates. This initiative comes amid growing concerns over lapses in certificate issuance and the proliferation of fake certificates, contributing to deteriorating air quality in the State. With vehicle registrations in the State witnessing an annual increase of 4-7 per cent, This enables prompt action against any irregularities and ensures seamless monitoring of vehicle emissions.

—Salar News

Vote if you want me to remain CM: Siddaramaiah

CM asks people of Varuna to give Cong a lead of 60k votes

MYSURU/MANDYA, 1 APRIL

Amid speculations about leadership change, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday asked the people of his Varuna to give Congress candidate a lead of 60,000 votes in the Lok Sabha polls. He said this was to ensure that he remains in the post.

In Mandya, Deputy Chief Minister and State Congress President DK Shivakumar, who has made no secret about his Chief Ministerial ambitions, told the people that the desire with which they supported the party in the Assembly poll in May last year, keeping him in mind, "will not turn out to be false."

The statements gain significance amid persistent rumours about leadership change in the ruling Congress in the State after Lok Sabha polls or mid-way of the current assembly's tenure.

"In 2019 (Lok Sabha polls) Dhruvanarayan (Congress candidate) lost by a margin of only 1,817 votes.... This time in the Assembly you made me win by giving a lead of 48,000 votes (in Varuna). Will you give the same lead or more now?" Siddaramaiah asked.

Addressing a public meeting, he said: "In Varuna you know me, as well as HC Mahadevappa (Minister). I'm your representative, (my son) Yathindra is a former MLA from here (Varuna)."

Siddaramaiah's Varuna segment comes under Chamarajanagar PHOTO: PTI

Siddarmaiah's Varuna Assembly segment comes under Chamarajanagar Lok Sabha constituency, from where Mahadevappa's son Sunil Bose is the Congress candidate.

Meanwhile, asking voters to support Congress in the Vokkaliga bastion of Mandya, Shivakumar said: "I want to tell you that, keeping me in mind, you gave more seats (in Assembly polls to Congress) in Mandya. Your desire will not turn out to be false. You need not worry."

Openly expressing his Chief Ministerial aspirations ahead of Assembly polls, Shivakumar had asked Vokkaliga community, to which he belongs, not to lose out an opportunity with him as the party's State unit president, while pointing out that SM Krishna was the last Vokkaliga to lead the party in the polls and then went on to become the CM in 1999.

—PTI

CM DEFENDS SON'S SPEECH AGAINST SHAH

MYSURU, 1 APRIL

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday defended his son Yathindra's statement targeting Union Home Minister Amit Shah, which BJP has termed as reprehensible and a personal attack on Shah and lodged a complaint with Election Commission.

Siddaramaiah said his son never intended to insult Shah and his statement was based on CBI's submission in the court. Addressing a party meeting in Hanur town of Chamarajanagar district last Thursday, Yathindra, a former MLA, allegedly said:

A day later, the Karnataka unit of BJP filed a complaint with the poll body describing the statement as a personal attack on the party leader and alleged that Yathindra had used "abusive and inflammatory language" against Shah. It said the statement violated provisions of the Model Code of Conduct.

—PTI

SEAT-SHARING DEAL

Shah to interact with JD(S) leaders: HDK

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

Amit Shah PHOTO: PTI

JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy said he will apprise Home Minister Amit Shah and share feedback on poll situation in constituencies across Stet, at Tuesday's breakfast meeting with him and state BJP state leaders.

The joint breakfast meeting is being seen as a move by the BJP to plug any trust gaps with its alliance partner -- the JD(S).

As per the seat-sharing deal for the Lok Sabha polls, the BJP will contest in 25 constituencies and the JD(S) in the remaining three in the State.

"We don't want small minor issues to disturb the understanding between both the parties, and our intention is that there should not be even a minor fault in reaching our goal. So we will discuss all matters with him," he said.

Kumaraswamy said he will also take part in Shah's road show in Channapatna, the Assembly segment which he represents, under the Bengaluru Rural Lok Sabha constituency, where his brother-in-law and eminent cardiologist CN Manjunath is contesting the polls on a BJP ticket. Shah is also slated to attend BJP meetings and programmes during the day.

Responding to a question on the possibility of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and JD(S) patriarch Deve Gowda sharing a stage during the campaign, Kumaraswamy said such plans have not been made yet, as the former has to travel across the country.

He indicated confidence about independent MP from Mandya, Sumalatha Ambareesh extending her support to him, in the upcoming polls Kumaraswamy, who is now the official candidate of NDA from Mandya Lok Sabha seat, on Sunday met Sumalatha, and sought her cooperation in the upcoming polls.

—PTI

Yaduveer, Sowmya Reddy file nominations for LS polls

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

The process of filing of nominations has picked up pace for the first of two phase Lok Sabha polls in Karnataka on 26 April, with several candidates submitting their papers on Monday.

Among them were BJP MP from Bengaluru Central PC Mohan and Congress candidate from Bengaluru South Sowmya Reddy, a former MLA V Somanna and K Sudhakar, who had served as Ministers in the previous BJP government, filed nominations from Tumakur and Chikkaballapur segments, respectively.

Sudhakar's opponent from Congress Raksha Ramaiah too filed his papers, as also the latter's party colleagues Venkataramane Gowda ('Star' Chandru) and Shreyas M Patel from Mandya and Hassan, respectively. Ahead of filing their papers, almost all the candidates visited temples and held road shows along with party leaders and a large number of supporters,

Mohan was accompanied by BJP veteran and former Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa and Leader of Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka as he filed his nomination. Deputy Chief Minister and state Congress President DK Shivakumar took part in Sowmya Reddy's roadshow ahead of her filing papers.

Nominations for first of two phases pick up pace PHOTO: SALAR

As many as 14 out of 28 Lok Sabha seats will be going for polls in the first phase, for which April four is the last day for filing nominations. Scrutiny of nominations will take place on April five, and April eight is the last day for withdrawal of candidature.

Sowmya is like my daughter: DKS

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar has likened Congress candidate for Bengaluru South Sowmya Reddy to his own daughter. Lauding her creativity and hard work, Shivakumar urged voters across all Assembly constituencies, particularly Bommanahalli and Basavanagudi, to vote for her.

Shivakumar attributed her loss not to personal shortcomings but to bureaucratic interference. Shivakumar dismissed notions of a Modi or BJP wave in the State. "There is only one wave and that is Congress guarantee wave," he said. Congress has given representation to Vokkaligas and women while selecting candidates, he said.

—PTI

BATTLEGROUND B'LURU CENTRAL

Congress candidate for Bengaluru Central Mansoor Ali Khan with party's Women Wing members at Congress Bhavan on Race Course Road in Bengaluru on Monday; Supporters of BJP candidate for Bengaluru Central PC Mohan dress up as Lord Ram and paint Prime Minister's photo on their bodies at a rally to file nomination at BBMP head office in Bengaluru PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Another tusker dies at Balle Elephant Camp after Arjuna

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

Elephant named Kumarswamy was found at Balle Elephant Camp in Nagarahole in Udupi district on Monday.

This comes just four months after the region mourned the passing of Arjuna, who died in a fight with a tusker in December 2023.

Kumarswamy's death is believed to be from indigestion, a cause for concern given the recent passing of its mahout. The post-mortem examination revealed the presence of undigested hay in Kumarswamy's stomach, suggesting a blockage that ultimately led to its demise.

There was concern about 46-year-old Kumarswamy's temperament and partial blindness, especially after its mahout died. The elephant was fed through its kavadi (assistant mahout) in Kabini backwaters, but it went missing on Wednesday. The elephant also lost its bell, making it difficult to track it down.

Joseph Hoover, a former member of State Wildlife Board and President of United Conservation Movement, told Salar News that the deaths of Arjuna and Kumarswamy within a short span are a stark reminder of the challenges the elephants in the State face. "Losing a mahout is not just an emotional blow to the animal, but it can also have severe consequences for their physical health, as evidenced by Kumarswamy's case.

Elephant Kumaraswamy at Balle elephant camp PHOTO: SALAR

Hoover emphasised the need for a robust support system for elephants who lose their mahouts. "We need well-defined protocols to ensure the well-being of these animals during such transitions. Veterinarian care, proper monitoring and alternative feeding methods like those attempted with Kumarswamy are crucial to prevent similar tragedies. Kavadi should be equally experienced as the mahout or another mahout should be kept ready to handle animals like these.

Department is investigating the incident.

—Salar News

Mangaluru's 'mid-street Iftar' planners get EC notice

MANGALURU, 1 APRIL

Election Commission of India has issued a notice to the organisers of the 'mid-street Iftar party' held at Mudupi grama Panchayat near here.

Over 200m of State Highway was blocked for over four hours till 2pm for the event on 30 March.

In the notice issued on Sunday, ECI has notified the main organiser of the 'Auto Rajakanmar Iftar' event, Abubakar Siddique, for violating the election model code of conduct. The iftar party was arranged on the state highway in Ullal Taluk at Mudipu junction, which is a busy intersection leading to the new IT hub of Dakshina Kannada district.

Election Commission of India PHOTO: PTI

- The event was hailed as a bold step towards communal harmony as they claimed that people from various communities participated in the event

ECI took note of the video of the event after it went viral on social media.

The event had restricted the traffic to one side of the road making it difficult for the motorists and pedestrians for more than four hours during peak time. All the rickshaw drivers of Ullal Taluk had conducted this iftar gathering which was attended by traders and locals. The event was hailed as a bold step towards communal harmony as they claimed that people from various communities participated in the event.

The ECI notice has asked Siddique to explain why action should not be taken against him for violating ECI norms.

—PTI

AMID DROUGHT

Chicken prices go up, eggs cost less

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

The residents of Bengaluru are seeing price swings in poultry items. While the prices of eggs have dropped, the chicken prices have drastically increased in the City.

Broiler chicken with skin, which was costing Rs 175 in the third week of March, is now priced at Rs 235-240 per kg and the skinless chicken, which was Rs 215 per kg, now cost Rs 265-270 per kg. The summer season complicated matters.

This price disparity highlights the complexities of the poultry industry, where factors like feed costs and seasonal fluctuations can have localised effects. The main reason for the chicken prices to increase is the ongoing drought plaguing Karnataka.

Chicken is priced at Rs 235 per kg, eggs at Rs 4.80 PHOTO: PTI

Lakshmanan S, a member of Broiler Coordination Committee of Palladam in Tamil Nadu, told **Salar News** "The drought has severely impacted the harvesting of soya and corn, key ingredients in chicken feed. This shortage has pushed the prices to increase not only in Mangaluru, but also in other districts of Karnataka."

Palladam Broiler Rate is the benchmark in Indian poultry industry and the broiler rates are fixed by Broiler Coordination Committee.

Egg prices come down

Unlike chicken, egg prices in Bengaluru have witnessed a surprising dip. Wholesale prices have dropped from Rs 6.50 to Rs 4.80 within one week. PV Senthil, the General Secretary of Livestock and Agri-farmers Trade Association and an exporter in Kaveri Group of Companies, told **Salar News** "This price decline can be due to two factors. The summer has reduced the shell life of eggs and traders don't want to keep the stocks for a long. Another reason is the natural dip in egg production as hens lay fewer eggs in the scorching summer months."

—Salar News

PHOTO: PTI

Growth should be RBI's top priority next decade: PM

MUMBAI, 1 APRIL

The Reserve Bank has to accord "top-most priority" to growth and at the same time focus on trust and stability, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday. Addressing the inauguration of the event commemorating 90 years of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) here, Modi said the next decade is as important for attaining the goal of developed India as it is for the RBI, which will complete 100 years of existence in 2035. Modi said as per the "mantra" of the central bank, "The RBI should make fast growth its top-most priority, along with focusing on trust and stability." Since 2016, keeping inflation under check has become the primary goal of the RBI. The comments come days ahead of the first monetary policy review of the new fiscal year. —*PTI*

Maratha quota activists try to stop BJP leader's car

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 1 APRIL

Maratha quota activists on Monday shouted slogans and tried to stop the car of Congress-turned BJP leader Ashok Chavan in Kondha village in Nanded, some 270 kilometres from here. Chavan was on his way to meet people in Naigaon tehsil there when the incident took place in the morning. A video showed quota activists shouting slogans and trying to stop his car before police took control of the situation and the vehicle moved ahead. In a video message, Chavan said every politician has the right to meet people and asserted he had worked for the cause of Maratha reservation. "If some people are shouting slogans, let them do it. Some persons from a few political parties are creating misunderstanding. —*PTI*

SDPI extends support to UDF in Kerala

KOCHI, 1 APRIL

Social Democratic Party of India (SDPI), the political arm of the banned Popular Front of India (PFI), on Monday extended its support to the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) in Kerala for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. However, Leader of Opposition in the State Assembly V D Satheesan told the media that the UDF has not reached any understanding with the SDPI. SDPI state President Muvattupuzha Ashraf Moulavi, who met the media here, said after considering all factors, the party has decided to support a secular front -- the UDF. "In Kerala, we have decided to support the Congress-led UDF which is spearheading the anti-BJP bloc," Moulavi told the media. —*PTI*

Ex-CM Soren withdraws SC plea against HC order

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren on Monday withdrew from the Supreme Court his plea challenging a high court order that refused to grant him permission to attend the Budget session of the Assembly. Soren had sought permission from the Jharkhand High Court to attend the Budget session that started on 23 February and came to an end on 2 March. On 28 February, the High Court had dismissed his plea. When his plea came up for hearing before a bench of Justices Surya Kant and KV Viswanathan on Monday, senior advocate Kapil Sibal, said he be allowed to withdraw the plea as the Budget session came to an end on 2 March. The apex court allowed him to withdraw the plea, and said the question of law is left open. Soren was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on 31 January. —*PTI*

Crack in INDIA: Vijayan says Cong wanted Kejri arrested

He says Cong wanted ED probe into Delhi liquor case

KOZHIKODE, 1 APRIL

The unity among 18 anti-BJP parties, who gathered in New Delhi to protest the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, showed signs of fracture a day later when veteran CPI(M) leader and Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Monday accused Congress of demanding Enforcement Directorate (ED) probe into the Delhi liquor excise policy case.

Vijayan alleged that when former Delhi deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia was arrested, Congress clamoured for the arrest of Kejriwal.

Addressing a press conference amidst his Lok Sabha poll campaign, seeking votes for LDF candidates, who are in direct fight against Congress-led UDF in many constituencies, Vijayan alleged that it was the grand old party which levelled the allegations against the Delhi government, demanded ED probe, and lodged a complaint regarding the matter.

Pinarayi Vijayan PHOTO: PTI

The Marxist veteran said the huge participation of people in INDIA rally held in New Delhi a day ago was a strong warning for BJP. He, however, added that Congress should also learn a lesson from the rally. He said the grand old party should introspect on their stand when it comes to attacking non-Congress parties across the country.

"It was Congress which raised the allegation against the Delhi government. It was the Congress which filed a complaint in that regard, paving the way for the probe by ED," Vijayan alleged.Speaking on INDIA bloc rally attended by all prominent leaders of anti-BJP parties including the Congress and CPI(M), he said it was essential that "we all stand together against such moves by BJP."It also comes in the wake of ED registering a case against his daughter, her company, for alleged financial irregularities. —*PTI*

'Atishi, Saurabh's names involved to shut down AAP'

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

The names of Delhi ministers Atishi and Saurabh Bharadwaj are being cited in connection with the alleged excise policy scam as BJP thinks jailing only Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal will not be enough to finish the AAP, an AAP leader Jasmine Shah said.

In a press conference on Monday, Shah asserted that Kejriwal will remain the Chief Minister no matter how long he is kept in jail because he has taken a constitutional oath to serve the people of Delhi. Kejriwal was arrested on 21 March by the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

When Vijay Nair was arrested one-and-a-half years ago, he had said that he did not report to the chief minister and that he reported to Atishi and Bharadwaj. —*PTI*

TAX DEMAND NOTICES

No coercive action against Cong: I-T to SC

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

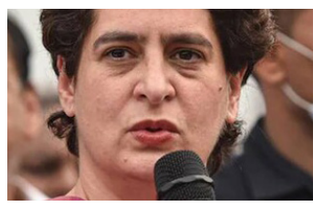
In a relief for Congress, the Income Tax department on Monday told Supreme Court that it will not take any coercive action against the Opposition party for tax demand notices of Rs 3500 crore approximately in view of Lok Sabha elections.

A bench of justices BV Nagarathna and Augustine George Masih recorded the statement of Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the IT department, that no precipitative action will be taken in the prevailing circumstances till the final adjudication of the matter.

"At the commencement of the hearing on this application, the solicitor general appearing for the respondent department, submitted that there is no dispute that on several dates in the month of March 2024, demands have been raised as against the appellant herein totalling approximately Rs 3500 crore," the bench noted.

The bench posted Congress' plea against different tax demand notices for hearing on 24 July.Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appreciated the gesture terming it "gracious" and said that all demand notices were issued in February and March for different years totalling Rs 3500 crore approximately.At the outset, Mehta said, "To balance the equity. The petitioner is a political party. Based upon the 2016 judgement, which is under challenge, we have raised the demand of Rs 1700 crore. Since the election is going on, we would not like any problem to arise for any party and therefore, till the matter is heard after the election, we will not take any action for recovery of Rs 1700 crore."Congress, has received fresh notices from the Income Tax department, raising a tax demand of Rs 1,745 crore for the assessment years 2014-15 to 2016-17.With this latest notice, the Income Tax department has raised a total demand of Rs 3,567 crore from Congress.

The authorities have ended the tax exemption available to political parties and have taxed the party for the entire collections, they added. —*PTI*



What is the allegation against the Congress? In 1994-95, again in 2014-15 and 2016-17 etc., leaders and workers had deposited some money in cash in the party's account, information of which had already been shared with the I-T department. But the government is levelling arbitrary allegations that the Cong has not provided information

-Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Congress leader

Katchatheevu takes centre stage ahead of Lok Sabha polls

It was Indira Gandhi's regime that concluded pacts in 1974 and 1976 giving away the island to Sri Lanka PHOTO: PIXABAY

CHENNAI, 1 APRIL

The MeMmotive issue of Katchatheevu, an island ceded to Sri Lanka by Congress government at the Centre in 1974 had always been a key point of discord between late chief ministers M Karunanidhi and J Jayalalithaa and the issue has occupied centre stage yet again, ahead of Lok Sabha polls.

The Katchatheevu retrieval issue had all along been a subject of intense debate between the Dravidian majors with the unceasing arrest and harassment of Tamil fishermen.

Jayalalithaa once vowed to retrieve the island to end the travails of fishermen and her party had always blamed DMK for doing nothing to stop it, though it held the reins of power in 1974.Karunanidhi had asserted he never accepted the ceding nor did he agree to it. He had expressed his Opposition as the chief minister. DMK has always pointed out that it had held state-wide protests to oppose the ceding of Katchatheevu.

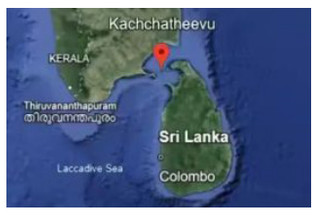


PHOTO: PTI

It was Indira Gandhi's regime at the Centre that concluded pacts in 1974 and 1976 giving away the island to Sri Lanka.

Jayalalithaa had even moved Supreme Court in 2008 for the island's retrieval in her personal capacity. Later, the state government, headed by the AIADMK had impleaded itself in the case.She had once clarified in the Assembly that she only said that she would take steps to retrieve the island by working with the Centre and she did not "foolishly say that she will mobilise troops from here" to achieve her goal.

In June 2016, Jayalalithaa met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and sought retrieval of Katchatheevu Ahead of the April 19 Lok Sabha polls, Katchatheevu issue is back in the spotlight in the wake of disclosures by the Ministry of External Affairs in response to a plea by BJP Tamil Nadu chief K Annamalai under the Right to Information (RTI) Act. —*PTI*

'Speak on Chinese aggression'

SIVAGANGA, 1 APRIL

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Monday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi should speak on "Chinese occupation" of Indian territory, rather than about Katchatheevu that was ceded to Sri Lanka to maintain good relations and to save the lives of lakhs of Tamils. Chidambaram, former Union home minister during his party-led UPA regime wondered why Modi was raking up an issue that was settled way back in 1974. That year, the Indira Gandhi government, in order to maintain good relations with Sri Lanka and to help lakhs and lakhs of Tamils there, negotiated with the island nation's government.

Following negotiations, a settlement was made on Katchatheevu, as belonging to Sri Lanka, he said. —*PTI*

EC raps BJP's Dilip, Supriya for remarks against women

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Election Commission (EC) on Monday censured BJP leader Dilip Ghosh and Congress' Supriya Shrinate for derogatory remarks against the dignity of women.

EC said it is convinced that they made a low-level personal attack and thus violated the provisions of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC).

They have been warned to remain careful in public utterances during the MCC period.

A copy of the warning notice or censure is also being marked to their respective party chiefs for sensitising their functionaries to be careful while communicating in public domain and refrain from any such derogatory comments and violations of model code guidelines.

A controversial comment was posted on social media platforms from Shrinate's accounts against Bollywood actor Kangana Ranaut, who has been fielded by BJP as its candidate from Mandi in Himachal Pradesh in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Following a row, Shrinate removed the controversial remarks from all her social accounts, claiming that those were not posted by her but by someone else who had access to her accounts.

Ghosh was captured on video mocking Trinamool Congress supremo and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's family background.

He later apologised for his contentious remarks against Banerjee. —*PTI*

Andhra Cong names 5 LS, 114 Assembly candidates

AMARAVATI/NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Andhra Pradesh Congress Committee President YS Sharmila on Monday said five Lok Sabha and 114 Assembly candidates have been confirmed for the ensuing polls in the state.

Sharmila, who is attending Congress central election committee meeting at AICC office in New Delhi said these candidates were finalised in the meeting today.

"The names of remaining candidates will be confirmed soon. The first list of candidates could be released tomorrow," said Sharmila in a press release.

Communist Party of India (CPI), Congress and CPI (M) are INDIA bloc partners in Andhra Pradesh.

Elections for the 175-member Assembly and 25 Lok Sabha seats in Andhra Pradesh are scheduled on 13 May and the counting of votes is slated for 4 June. —*PTI*

BJP complains to EC over TMC posting candidate's private info

KOLKATA, 1 APRIL

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has written a letter to the Election Commission of India (ECI) alleging that Trinamool Congress (TMC) has violated fundamental rights of privacy of party candidate Rekha Patra by putting her personal details on social media.

Demanding action, it has called for TMC's X handle to be suspended for the remaining campaigning period and demanded an 'unconditional apology'.

BJP in a letter to the Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners, alleged that TMC's Social Media Incharge Debganshu Bhattacharya and the party's official X handle posted the personal details of Patra her personal phone number and her bank details, which is a "clear violation of her right to privacy."

BJP also raised concerns over how TMC, has "unlawful access" to the confidential private data of the beneficiaries that is in exclusive custody for the State Government.

Patra, was the first one who raised the voice for the women of Sandeshkhali and all three accused in the case, namely TMC MLA Sheikh Shahjahan, Shibu Hazra and Uttam Sardar, were arrested later. Also, BJP urged ECI to order lodging of an FIR against TMC leader Piyush Panda and ban him from campaigning, alleging that he hurled a casteist slur against Prime Minister Narendra Modi during an election rally in West Bengal. —*ANI/PTI*

PHOTO: X/ @AMITMALVIYA

SHAHJAHAN SENT TO ED CUSTODY TILL 13 APRIL

KOLKATA, 1 APRIL

The suspended Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Shahjahan Sheikh on Monday remanded to Enforcement Directorate (ED) custody till 13 April in the Sandeshkhali ED assault case.

Earlier today, the ED produced now-suspended TMC leader Sheikh in the Sessions Court, Kolkata.

ED filed two Enforcement Case Information Reports (ECIR) against him.

One ERIC was regarding ration (PDS) corruption, the source of which was found in a letter written by Jyotipriroyo Mallik, former Bengal food minister.

The other one was filed in regard to unlawful dealings in export-import transactions. This ECIR has allegations of forcible land acquisition.

As per the ED sources, Shahjahan was interrogated in relation to the second ERIC, which involved land grab allegations, on Saturday.

Earlier, suspended Sheikh was sent to judicial custody in the Sandeshkhali Enforcement Directorate assault case. —*PTI*

STAY ALERT

AI-deepfake video potential threat during elections

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

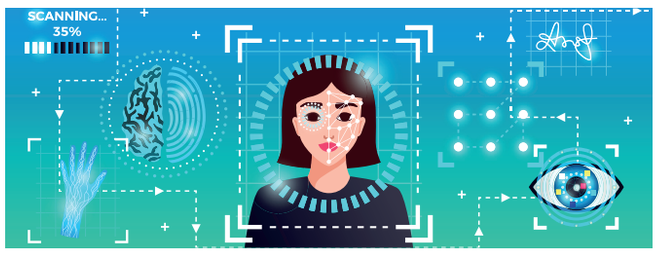
As political parties go all out to woo voters ahead of the general elections, cybersecurity experts have raised concern over the possible misuse of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and deepfake technology, among others, to influence the electorate.

Lok Sabha polls in India will take place in seven phases between 19 April and 1 June.

Election Commission of India (ECI) has already issued standard operating procedures for identification and quick response to fake news and misinformation.

"Deepfake videos and voice cloning are two tools that could be massively used during the election campaign," a senior officer of the Delhi Police's cybercrimes unit said.

There is no technology available that can automatically detect and differentiate between original and fake video content created using AI.In January 2024, during the New Hampshire primary of the Democratic Party in the US, a robocall mimicking President Joe Biden's voice falsely advised voters not to participate, claiming it would affect their eligibility for the general electionn Slovakia, an AI-generated voice, mimicking that of a liberal candidate, discussing plans to raise alcohol prices and rig the election was widely circulated on Facebook.



The commission has requested all political parties and candidates to ensure that their supporters do not spread fake news PHOTO: PTI

Former Indian Police Service (IPS) officer and cybersecurity expert Triveni Singh said the widespread dissemination of AI-generated misinformation can erode public trust in the electoral process and democratic institutions.

He said the Centre has made the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) the nodal agency for taking down objectionable online content. Singh suggested that security agencies can create specialised teams equipped with tools to detect and analyse deepfake and voice cloning. These teams should be available round the clock, especially during critical periods such as elections.

The commission has requested all political parties and candidates to ensure that their supporters do not spread fake news. Strict watch on social media is being kept by the poll body's Media Certification and Monitoring Committee to ensure that the election atmosphere is not vitiated, he said. —*PTI*

Assam cops grill dhaba owner for Khalistani poster

GUWAHATI, 1 APRIL

A roadside dhaba owner hailing from Punjab was picked up from Assam's Bongaigaon on suspicion of being a Khalistani sympathiser, a police officer said on Monday. According to Bongaigaon SP Mohan Lal Meena, the person kept a poster of Khalistani ideologue Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and others in his line hotel, located near Gerukabari outpost on National Highway-27. "There is a photo of Bhindranwale. In another photo, a person is waving a flag similar to that of a Khalistani one. We are examining it," he told PTI.The person Gurmukh Singh from the Tarn Taran district of Punjab also kept a photo of slain controversial rapper Sidhu Moosewala, Meena said. "He claimed that some truck drivers gave him the pictures. He might be a sympathiser, but we cannot say it at the moment," the cop said.—*PTI*

Helicopter launched for Adi Kailash, Om Parvat peaks

PITHORAGARH, 1 APRIL

A helicopter service to the Adi Kailash and the Om Parvat peaks from the Naini Saini Airport in this Uttarakhand district was launched on Monday, officials said. The service was launched by Joint Magistrate Ashish Mishra. Under the Uttarakhand government's Heli Darshan scheme, an Mi-19 helicopter will take pilgrims from the airport to Adi Kailash and Om Parvat in the Vyas Valley region and return after hovering over the peaks. The two-hour trip will cost Rs 40,000, plus GST, per head and be operated by Sky One Airways, District Tourist Officer Kriti Chandra Arya said.Nineteen pilgrims took the trip on the inaugural run, he said. —PTI

PIL on Netaji Bose's death: SC slams petitioner

MALAPURAM, 1 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Monday came down heavily on a petitioner who has filed a public interest litigation concerning death of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, saying the plea contains "reckless and irresponsible allegations" against leaders who are no longer alive.Observing that the petitioner has not even spared Mahatma Gandhi in the plea, the apex court said the bona fide of the petitioner is required to be tested.A bench of Justices Surya Kant and KV Viswanathan asked petitioner Pinak Pani Mohanty, who has said in his plea that he is the Cuttack district secretary of World Human Rights Protection Organisation (India), what work he has done for public interest and human rights of people.—*PTI*

SC refuses to stay HC order on farmer's death

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to stay the Punjab and Haryana High Court direction setting up a panel to probe farmer Shubhkaran Singh's death during a clash between the protesting farmers and the Haryana security personnel in February.The Supreme Court said the supervision of the matter by a panel headed by a retired judge would infuse fairness and transparency.The apex court was hearing a petition filed by the Haryana government challenging the high court's 7 March order which had formed a committee headed by a former high court judge to inquire into the death of Shubhkaran Singh during the clash. Shubhkaran,21, a native of Bathinda, was killed and several police personnel were injured in clashes at Khanauri on the Punjab-Haryana border.—*PTI*

Hapless Jalpaiguri residents await relief after storm

Five people are dead, 200 rendered homeless due to storm

JALPAIGURI, 1 APRIL

Residents of Jalpaiguri town and its surrounding areas in West Bengal continue to grapple with the aftermath of Sunday's storm, which left at least five people dead and rendered over 200 homeless.

Amid the chaos, a hapless Pankaj Ray stares at the ruins of his home, surrounded by scattered bricks and twisted tin walls.

His family, once united by love, now bears the scars of the storm.

While one family member is fighting for life in hospital, others are struggling to manage a square meal.

Ten-year-old Anjali clings on to her father's hand, seeking comfort in the midst of the destruction.

Their once joyful abode has been torn apart, forcing them to run from pillar to post looking for a place to stay.

Nearly 200 people were injured and several houses were damaged, trees uprooted and electric poles came crashing down as strong winds accompanied by hail struck most parts of the district headquarters town and many areas of neighbouring Mainaguri.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who rushed to the district late on Sunday night, assured people of all help from the administration. —*PTI*

Nearly 200 people were injured and several houses were damaged, trees uprooted as storm struck Mainaguri area *PHOTO: PTI*

Assam: Child dies, two missing as boat capsizes in Brahmaputra

GUWAHATI, 1 APRIL

A four-year-old child died and two people were reported missing after a boat capsized in the Brahmaputra, amid heavy rain and hailstorm in South Salmara-Mankachar district of Assam, a senior official said on Monday.The sudden storm accompanied with hail and a downpour lashed several parts of the state on Sunday evening, uprooting trees, electric poles and damaging houses, Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) CEO Gyanendra Dev Tripathi said.The deceased has been identified as Samin Mondal,4, while Kobat Ali Mondal,56, and Ismail Ali ,8, are missing, Tripathi said. —*PTI*

RAINS LASH KAMRUP, DAMAGE HOUSES

KAMRUP, 1 APRIL

After experiencing dry and hot weather for the past few weeks, heavy rains accompanied by hailstorms wreaked havoc in parts of Assam's Kamrup district and neighbouring areas on Sunday, causing extensive damage to public and private properties.

Several houses were damaged, and trees and electric poles were uprooted in the Nagarbera area of Kamrup district due to the severe hailstorm.Naitor Kalyanpur, Naitor Udla, Jamlai, Bidyanagar, and Hekra villages are among the worst affected areas. Vehicular movement was also affected for hours as uprooted trees blocked roads in various parts of the district."My house was damaged, and many other houses in our locality were also damaged. Many families of Naitor Udla, Kalyanpur, Jamlai, Bidyanagar, Lahotari, and Nagarbera have been badly affected. My wife and daughter were busy cooking when a bunch of trees hit my house due to the storm. Both of them were injured," a Nagarbera resident said. —*ANI*

ASI SURVEY ON

SC refuses to stay survey of Bhojshala

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Supreme Court on Monday issued notice on the plea challenging Madhya Pradesh High Court order directing survey by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) at the Bhojshala Temple-Kamal Maula Mosque complex.

Meanwhile, it has also refused to stay ASI's survey in the disputed sites.

In an interim direction, a bench of justices Hrishikesh Roy and Prashant Kumar Mishra says no action should be taken without its permission on the outcome of the ASI's survey. It also clarified that no physical excavation should be taken in disputed sites which will change its character.

Maulana Kamaluddin Welfare Society approached Supreme Court against Madhya Pradesh High Court order directing ASI to survey the disputed site.

Hindus consider Bhojshala, to be a temple dedicated to Vagdevi, while Muslims know it as the Kamal Maula Mosque.

Under an arrangement made by the ASI on 7 April, 2003, Hindus perform puja in the Bhojshala premises on Tuesdays, while Muslims offer namaz in the complex on Fridays.

A bench of Justices Hrishikesh Roy and PK Mishra issued notices to the Centre, Madhya Pradesh government, ASI and others on the plea filed by Maulana Kamaluddin Welfare Society challenging the 11 March order of the MP High Court on scientific survey. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

- Maulana Kamaluddin Welfare Society approached Supreme Court against Madhya Pradesh High Court order directing ASI to survey the disputed site. Hindus consider Bhojshala while Muslims know it as the Kamal Maula Mosque

NO TO MUSLIMS' PLEA

SC refuses stay on Hindu prayers in Gyanvapi Mosque

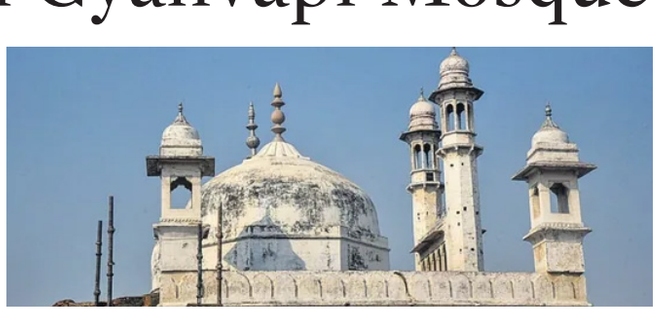
NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to stay the Hindu prayers in the southern cellar of the Gyanvapi mosque and sought response of the Kashi Vishwanath Temple trustees on the plea of the mosque management committee.

The top court also ordered maintaining of status quo on offering of namaz by Muslims in the Gyanvapi premises in Varanasi.

The court was hearing a fresh plea of the Gyanvapi mosque management committee against an Allahabad High Court decision upholding a lower court's order allowing Hindu prayers in the southern cellar of the mosque.A bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud also sought response of priest Shailendra Kumar Pathak Vyas by 30 April on the plea of the mosque committee.

The bench, which also comprised Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, was hearing the plea of the mosque committee which manages the affairs of the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi. The High Court, on 26 February, had dismissed the committee's plea in which it had challenged the district court's 31 January order allowing Hindus to offer prayers in the cellar.While dismissing the plea of the mosque committee, the high court had observed that the Uttar Pradesh government's 1993 decision of stopping worship rituals inside the "Vyas Tehkhana" -- located at the southern cellar of Gyanvapi -- was "illegal". —*PTI*



Court ordered maintaining of status quo on offering of namaz *PHOTO: PTI*

HC GRANTS RELIEF TO WANKHEDE TILL 10 APRIL

MUMBAI, 1 APRIL

Bombay High Court said no coercive steps shall be taken against IRS officer Sameer Wankhede till 10 April on notices issued to him on NCB's inquiry over irregularities in Sushant Singh Rajput's case.

Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) initiated the preliminary inquiry against Wankhede in the drugs case about Rajput's death and another case of arrest of a Nigerian national for drug possession, probed by Wankhede after it received anonymous complaints of irregularities during the investigation into them.

After Rajput allegedly committed suicide at his residence in Mumbai in June 2020, the NCB initiated a probe into alleged drug use in the film industry.The agency later lodged a case of alleged possessionand financing of drugs against Rajput's girlfriend Rhea Chakraborty. —*PTI*

Rajasthan: Dalit boy beaten for touching bucket

JAIPUR, 1 APRIL

An eight-year-old Dalit boy was allegedly beaten up for touching an upper caste man's bucket in the Ramgarh area of Rajasthan's Alwar, police said on Monday. According to the complaint filed by the boy's father, Ratiram Thakur on Saturday assaulted him because he had allegedly touched his bucket, kept near the handpump at a government school. The boy, a Class 4 student at the school, had gone to get water from the handpump. Thakur runs a tea stall in his village. —*PTI*

- Ratiram Thakur on Saturday assaulted him because he had allegedly touched his bucket, kept near the handpump at school

C Radhakrishnan resigns from Sahitya Akademi

MALAPURAM,1 APRIL

Noted Malayalam writer C Radhakrishnan resigned as an eminent member of the Kendra Sahitya Akademi on Monday in protest against this year's Akademi festival being inaugurated by a Union minister, who, according to him, lacks any known credentials in literature.

In his resignation letter to the Akademi secretary, Radhakrishnan alleged that this was the first time such a thing had happened in the long and illustrious history of the Sahitya Akademi which has consistently upheld the autonomy of the institution against pressures to yield to political clout.

Renowned for his critically acclaimed novels like "Munpe Parakkunna Pakshikal," "Spandamapinikale Nandi", and "Theekkadal Kadanju Thirumadhuram", he stated that all members of the Akademi had protested when a minister of state had participated in the inaugural session of the festival and that subsequently, assurances were given that this would not recur.

Radhakrishnan, however, clarified that he was not against any particular political party and that his protest was against the politicisation of the administration of culture, which erodes the independent stature of the Akademi. —*PTI*

5 injured as leopard barges into Delhi house

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

At least five people were injured in an attack by a leopard which strayed into a village in north Delhi's Wazirabad on Monday morning, triggering panic among the locals, officials said.

The leopard was later rescued.

According to officials, the leopard had jumped from the terrace of a house in Jagatpur village early in the morning and barged into the next building where it was locked in a room. Videos on social media showed the leopard being chased by some people and others running in panic.

According to the Delhi Fire Service, information about the incident was received around 6.20 am and two fire tenders were sent to the spot.

A resident said the leopard was first spotted around 4.30 am and a PCR call was made at 5.15 am. It tried to attack over a dozen people and injured some of them.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (north) MK Meena said a call about the leopard entering a house was received from Jagatpur village, following which the local police reached the spot and forest department officials were informed. —*PTI*

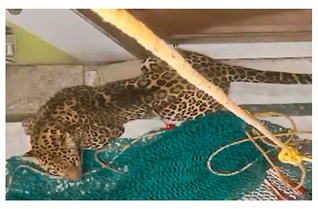


PHOTO: PTI

Will punish Madrassa teacher's killers: Kerala CM

KOZHIKODE, 1APRIL

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Monday said his government is committed to ensuring deserved punishment for the killers of Mohammed Riyas Moulavi, a Madrassa teacher who was found murdered inside a mosque in Kasaragod seven years ago, and said all possibilities of law would be explored for that.

The practice of killing people in the name of religious hatred must be stopped at any cost and the government is taking all steps in this regard, he said at a press conference here.

The chief minister also rejected opposition criticism against his government over the recent acquittal of RSS activists in the sensational case and said the police and the prosecution maintained transparency and absolute honesty throughout the investigation and trial.

Even the family of the deceased Moulavi had mentioned their sincerity and dedication in the case on many occasions, he said.

"There was no negligence or delay in the investigation or in the conduct of the case," Vijayan said.

A court in Kasaragod on Saturday acquitted three RSS activists in the case saying that the prosecution was not able to prove the accused had any kind of enmity with the Muslim community.

Despite all the evidence, scientific results and witnesses' statements, the verdict in the case didn't uphold the findings of the prosecution, which has triggered shock in society, Vijayan claimed."The government is committed to ensuring that the killers of Riyas Moulavi get the punishment they deserve. All possibilities of law would be explored for that. Steps have already been initiated in this regard," the Chief Minister said. He further said that from the day of their arrest, the accused people had to spend seven years and seven days in jail as trial prisoners.

Though they tried for bail several times, it was denied to them due to the strict stance of the government, Vijayan explained. —*PTI*

5TH DEATH IN 3 MONTHS

Wild tusker tramples Kerala man to death

PATHANAMTHITTA, 1 APRIL

A 53-year-old man was attacked and killed by a wild elephant when he tried to chase away the animal that strayed into the surroundings of his house on the forest fringes in Thulappally here in the early hours of Monday, police said.

This is the fifth death caused by wild elephants in Kerala in the past three months.

Biju, a local auto driver, came out of his house along with his wife, hearing the trumpets of an elephant outside. The animal grabbed him using its trunk and threw him to the ground twice, Biju's wife Daisy, who witnessed the terrible incident, said later.

The animal was seen trying to uproot a coconut tree in the surrounding area and it moved towards him fast after trumpeting multiple times, she said.

Recalling the tragic events, the teary-eyed woman said the animal rushed towards Biju suddenly and grabbed him by its trunk, throwing him to the ground twice.

It later ran away into the forest, she said.

"As there was no response, I went to the spot and saw him lying motionless on the floor," Daisy added.

A police team rushed to the spot after being informed, and shifted Biju's body to Kottayam Medical College.

Local residents later staged a sit-in protest in the area, demanding a permanent solution to address the issue of human-animal conflict.

Later in the day, Health Minister Veena George visited Biju's house and consoled his family members.

She assured them that the government would provide adequate compensation to the family as early as possible.

Kerala has witnessed a series of deaths of people due to the attack of wild elephants in recent months.

The Kerala government has been seeking to amend the Wildlife (Protection) Act, citing challenges faced by the state in dealing with instances of wild animals encroaching into human settlements. —*PTI*

The animal was seen trying to uproot a coconut tree in the surrounding area and it moved towards the man fast *PHOTO: PTI*

- Biju, a local auto driver, came out of his house along with his wife, hearing the trumpets of an elephant outside. The animal grabbed him using its trunk and threw him to the ground twice

INTERNATIONAL TRANSGENDER DAY

An attendee flips open a fan while dancing on the street during a march to celebrate International Transgender Day of Visibility, in Lisbon, Portugal
PHOTO: PTI

Kerala women still lack representation in politics

WOMEN'S RESERVATION BILL

Kerala has so far sent only nine women MPs to the Lok Sabha since the first general election in 1951–52, despite the highest participation in the electoral roll
PHOTO: PTI

When the historic "Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam" was passed in Parliament last year, jubilant women politicians, cutting across parties, broke into celebration distributing sweets and exuding confidence that it would enable them to get a fairer deal in the upcoming elections.

Celebrations over the passage of the landmark Bill were no less in Kerala, where over 1.40 crore voters are women and 50 per cent seats are reserved for them in local bodies.

Although the Women's Reservation Bill would be implemented only after 2029 Lok Sabha polls, female politicians widely expected that they would get a remarkable representation in the candidates' list of the general elections.

On the contrary, they continued to get a raw deal in the southern state from the parties that had waxed eloquent about the passage of the historic Bill.

While the major fronts, the CPI(M)-led LDF and Congress-led UDF, have given three and one seat respectively to women, BJP-led NDA has set aside five seats for their female politicians in the upcoming LS polls.

Interestingly, the southern state has so far sent only nine women MPs to the Lok Sabha since the first general election in 1951–52, despite the highest participation in the electoral roll, 100 per cent literacy, and women empowerment initiatives.

Several women leaders, cutting across political ideologies, have admitted that they expected more representation this time when their parties released candidate lists for the Lok Sabha polls.

While some women opined that the implementation of the Women's Reservation Bill would only help them get a fairer representation in male-dominated politics, others justified their party's decision to limit the number of women candidates this time considering the political scenario at the national level.

Senior CPI (M) leader P K Sreemathi said women's outfits adopt a strong stand for the Women Reservation Bill as the socio-political circumstances in the country are yet to evolve in favour of them.

Though the Constitution stands for equality, the political leadership of various parties need to change their mindset, giving equal space for women, she said.

"In Kerala, LDF led by CPI (M) is the only political front that has always ensured their representation in its governments," Sreemathi claimed.

There has been no Left government in the state without the participation of women since the formation of Kerala in 1957, she recalled.

"However, Congress-headed United Democratic Front, which had ruled the state for almost the same number of years, had governments without the participation of women," the leader said.

Senior Congress leader and former MLA Shanimol Uzman, who has always raised her voice in support of fairer representation of women in electoral politics, said they would get deserved representation only when the Women's Reservation Bill is implemented in the country.

However, she strongly objected to BJP campaign that the party-led government had passed the historic bill to protect the interests of crores of women in the country.

"BJP's claim is just meaningless and hollow, as they have done that without conducting the mandatory delimitation and the census procedures. It was just an eyewash to gain votes after creating the impression that they stand with women," Uzman said.

While seeking more representation for women in electoral politics, she said that the fairer sex has not always been denied its due.

Head of the District Congress Committee in Kollam, Bindu Krishna said she expected more women to figure in the list announced by the party for LS candidates this time.

"But when the party leadership decided not to replace the sitting MPs, only Remya Haridas could find a place on the list. As far as the party is concerned, this election is very crucial, and each seat counts at the national level," she told PTI.

BJP candidate in Kasaragod constituency Ashwini ML said her party always stood for woman empowerment and the passage of the much-delayed Women's Reservation Bill was proof of Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government's commitment to the welfare of women.

"The Women's Reservation Bill was the guarantee of PM Modi, and he fulfilled it..," she told PTI.

The women in the state had to wait long 15 years to get a representative after the tenure of Mascrene.

—PTI

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

WB sees massive shift in farming, abandons wheat

West Bengal is witnessing a significant shift in crop patterns. Farmers are increasingly abandoning wheat cultivation in favour of more profitable alternatives. In Murshidabad and Nadia districts, bordering Bangladesh, farmers are cultivating banana, lentils and maize in place of wheat.

"I own 3.7 hectares of farmland, and some 0.75 hectare of the land is located between Bangladesh and India border. Traditionally, my family grew wheat but it is not as economically feasible for us any more," said Montu Mondal, a farmer from Sarkarpura village. Mondal has replaced about 80 per cent of his wheat with banana plantations.

One of the major reasons behind the massive shift is a fungal disease that affects the crop, also called wheat blast. The disease was detected in Bangladesh in 2016 and the state government instituted a two-year ban on wheat cultivation in border areas and the two districts in an attempt to 'starve' the pathogen. The ban extended till 2022 in the region.

Mondal stated the only reason he has not completely replaced wheat with bananas is that the Border Security Force does not allow tall trees to grow in border areas. "Wheat consumes water and its market price has not risen. The government monitors food grain prices because it is part of the Public Distribution System," he added.

Extreme weather events like hailstorms and unseasonal rains exacerbate the damage to wheat crop yield as well, Mondal rued.

Rintu Mondal, another village farmer, stated bananas are more profitable, particularly during the festive season. "We may earn Rs 350-400 per cluster during peak season, but on average, we can earn Rs 150-200," he said.

Banana is also a gamble as it may get damaged during floods or heavy rains, Rintu acknowledged. "But for now, it seems to be a better alternative to wheat," he said.

In 2016, wheat blast-like symptoms were observed on the crops of Baidul Islam from Majhardiar village in Raninagar Gram Panchayat, Murshidabad district. "Cases like my crops prompted the government ban on growing wheat. I had to burn down my entire crop," he said.

Baidul has been growing jute, lentils and other vegetable crops instead of wheat since then. He also complained the water table in his region is rapidly declining, likely due to wheat farming.

But the ban on growing wheat impacted farmers massively, said Baidul. "Farmers are concerned that the disease will return and cause massive losses. Some farmers in the village have also chosen to grow paddy, which is new to the region," he said.

Maize is quickly replacing wheat in the area. According to state government statistics, maize production has increased eightfold, from 325,000 tonnes in 2011 to 2.9 million tonnes in 2023.

Over the last five years, the average area of maize cultivation has increased from 264,000 hectares to 400,000 hectares.

An agriculture officer from Kolkata, West Bengal on condition of anonymity, said wheat fetches growers around Rs 3,200-3,800 per quintal, while maize earns them about Rs 1,800. "However, the per-hectare output is higher compared to wheat, and hence the crops becomes more profitable," he said.

Poultry and food processing companies also purchase maize, helping farmers command premium prices, the officer added. Farmers see maize as a new cash crop, replacing wheat and other crops.

The statistics further showed that pulses production has increased three times from 142,000 tonnes to 440,000 tonnes in the past decade. Oilseeds production has almost doubled from 700,000 tonnes to 1.3 million tonnes.

The agriculture officer stated that the prohibition on wheat cultivation prompted the experimentation with alternative crops. In recent years, the state government has also promoted new hybrid maize and pulse varieties, resulting in an increase in crop cultivation.

"Wheat was never much of a profit-making crop. But it persisted because farmers grew it traditionally," the office said.

However, the change in cropping patterns is not likely to impact national wheat security.

The official said the state contributes less than a per cent of the total wheat production in the country.

"It will not make much of a difference on overall wheat produce, but may help farmers in the state get better returns from other crops," he added.

—DowntoEarth

One of the major reasons behind the massive shift is a fungal disease that affects the crop, also called wheat blast
PHOTO: PTI

Gao Yaojie: The high cost of being a whistleblower in China

In the early 1990s, a mysterious illness began to spread rapidly among villagers across several provinces in central China.

At the time, HIV/AIDS had already emerged in other parts of the world, including Europe and the United States, where cases were transmitted mostly through sexual contact. In China, however, people were infected after selling their blood and plasma or receiving transfusions contaminated in the trade.

Over the following decade, as many as 300,000 people in Henan province, the epicentre of the trade, were infected – a scandal exposed by local retired gynaecologist Dr Gao Yaojie.

Long before eye doctor Li Wenliang sounded the alarm on COVID-19 and succumbed to the virus in early 2020,Yaoji was China's best-known whistleblower. Her decision to expose the source of China's AIDS epidemic made her an exile for the last 14 years of her life. She died last December at the age of 95 in New York.

Despite official erasure (Baidubake, China's Wikipedia equivalent, says Gao settled overseas on a visiting fellowship), Chinese netizens mourned Gao's death on the same Weibo "wailing wall" page where they commemorated Li.

"All she wanted was the freedom to speak out, to tell the whole world the truth behind China's AIDS epidemic and to keep a record for history," said former journalist Lin Shiyu, who edited most of the books Gao published while in exile in the US. "That was why she fled China."

As the yet-unsolved origin of the COVID-19 pandemic shows, the secrecy Beijing enforces has repercussions for the rest of the world. Across the globe, more than 7 million people have died from the "mysterious virus" that first emerged in Wuhan in late 2019, according to the latest figures from the World Health Organization.

Yaoji did not set out to be an activist, much less a whistleblower. She became alarmed when she started to see patients in Henan province with tumours that she knew were common symptoms of AIDS. Few had been tested for HIV, let alone diagnosed, until Gao insisted.

"As a doctor I couldn't turn a blind eye; I had a responsibility to do all I could to prevent this epidemic from spreading. However, at the time, I was unaware of the unfathomable forces underlying the widespread transmission of HIV," Gao wrote in her 2008 memoir, The Soul of Gao Yaojie. "Had I known, I might not have been able to muster the courage."

Dr Gao Yaojie became alarmed when she started to see patients in Henan province with tumours that she knew were common symptoms of AIDS
PHOTO: X/ BBC NEWS

Soon enough, she discovered that the plasma trade – especially prevalent in rural areas where impoverished villagers needed to supplement their income – had become a vector for transmission. Once Beijing banned most imported blood products, part of its attempt to frame the virus as having a "foreign" origin, pharmaceutical firms ratcheted up domestic demand, making the problem worse.

Even the Chinese Red Cross and its People's Liberation Army-run hospitals got into the booming blood business. Local officials who stood to profit told villagers that selling plasma was also great for their health. Many were infected with HIV because dirty needles were routinely reused to draw blood.

Half of the 3,000 villagers in one county in Henan province made ends meet with the blood money at the time; 800 developed AIDS, Yaoji noted in her memoir.

'Officially controlled process'

As much as Gao's fight to expose the source of transmissions and to staunch the blood trade rankled local officials, the central government recognised her efforts. When provincial officials put her under house arrest in 2007, the health minister intervened so Gao could travel to the US to receive an award.

Even though "whistleblowing" is translated literally into Chinese, the idea is not new, and the right to report wrongdoings was protected in the first constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC) of 1954.

This stated that "all the PRC citizens had the right to make oral or written reports of any power abuses to the authorities", according to political scientist Ting Gong in her 2000 paper titled Whistleblowing: what does it mean in China?

The tide soon turned on Gao and others. Dr Wan Yanhai, a health official-turned-advocate, was detained in 2002 after distributing a secret government document on 170 AIDS-related deaths.

As with COVID-19, in the case of AIDS, "the impulse to cover up is ideological: Beijing deems its communist system the best in the world and brooks no fault", Wan told Al Jazeera in February from New York after being barred from returning home to China since 2010. That was the year Wan defied officials' warnings and attended the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in Oslo to honour Liu Xiaobo, the Chinese dissident scholar who eventually died in prison in 2017.

For Gao, accolades worldwide and foreign media coverage of her work only gave Chinese officials further cause to rein her in.

After her book tour to Hong Kong in 2008, officials stepped up their surveillance and even cut her off from her family members. Several months later, Gao escaped with only a blood pressure meter and a floppy disk containing details and photos of patients. At 81, Gao was the oldest dissident ever to have fled China. Barely one month after her death, prominent economist Mao Yushi set a new record. Mao, whose liberal think tank known for advocating market reforms was shut down by officials, shared pictures on social media of his 95th birthday celebrations in Vancouver, Canada, not long after he fled China. Yaoji kept writing books into her last days.

"She was used to running around to tend to her patients. She felt useless merely writing on a notepad," said Lin. Yet, Gao never took her final years in exile for granted.

"The US is no paradise," wrote Gao, but she added: "Had I never left [China], I wouldn't have lived past 90."

—Al Jazeera

PHOTO: PTI

9 killed as land mine explodes in Afghan village

ISLAMABAD, 1 APRIL

An old land mine found by children in eastern Afghanistan exploded while they were playing with it, killing nine children, a Taliban spokesman said Monday. The mine, which the children found near their village in Gero district in Ghazni province, was from decades ago, said Hamidullah Nisar, director of the Taliban's information and culture department in Ghazni. He said the explosion Sunday killed five boys and four girls who were 5 to 10 years old. Afghanistan has suffered from decades of war and remains highly dangerous for children who collect scrap metal to sell to support their families. Many are killed or maimed when they come across unexploded ordinance. *—AP*

2 Pak soldiers killed as armed men open fire

KARACHI, 1 APRIL

Unidentified armed men opened indiscriminate fire on a Pakistan Army bomb disposal team near the port city of Gwadar in the restive Balochistan province, killing two soldiers and injuring four others. The bomb disposal team of the Pakistan Army was busy clearing landmines in the Ankara Dam area of Gwadar district when gunmen opened fire on them on Sunday, the Dawn newspaper reported on Monday. Two security personnel were killed and four others injured in the attack in the Ankara Dam area on Sunday, officials said. "The firing incident took place some 25km from the port city [Gwadar], which claimed two lives and injured four others," said Gwadar SSP Mohsin Zohaib, adding that after the incident, the bodies and the injured were shifted to a nearby hospital. *—PTI*

Gunmen in Ecuador kill 8 and injure 8 others

QUITO, 1 APRIL

Armed gunmen attacked a group of people in Ecuador 's coastal city of Guayaquil killing eight people and injuring eight others, the Interior Ministry said, the latest in a string of violent incidents in the South American country. At around 7 pm local time on Saturday, armed men arrived in a vehicle in the southern neighbourhood of Guasmo, witnesses said. They shot at a group of people, killing two of them. Six others later died in a health centre due to the "seriousness of the wounds," the ministry told journalists. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack. It was the second mass killing in as many days. On Friday, five people who had been kidnapped were killed execution style in the coastal province of Manabi by an armed gang. *—AP*

Pakistan: Hundreds of turtles killed by electrocution

CHINIOT, 1 APRIL

A tragic incident unfolded along the serene Chenab River, renowned for its diverse ecosystem, as hundreds of turtles were found dead, ARY News reported. Local authorities have confirmed the loss of hundreds of turtles, integral members of the river's biodiversity, due to electrocution. The citizens of Chiniot are demanding swift action from the Deputy Commissioner and Chief Minister to hold those responsible for this cruel act accountable, according to ARY News. They insist on justice and call for measures to prevent such tragedies from recurring. Calls for stricter regulations and enforcement resonate, emphasising the urgent need to protect the vulnerable inhabitants of the Chenab River from further harm, ARY reported. *—ANI*

GAZA HOSPITAL IN RUINS AFTER 2-WEEK RAID

UN said several patients died, dozens were put at risk during raid

DEIR AL BALAH, 1 APRIL

The Israeli military withdrew from Gaza's largest hospital early on Monday after a two-week raid, leaving behind several bodies and a vast swath of destruction, according to Palestinian residents.

The military has described the raid on Shifa Hospital as one of the most successful operations of the nearly six-month war. It says it killed scores of Hamas and other militants, including senior operatives who had regrouped there after an earlier raid, and that it seized weapons and valuable intelligence.

The UN health agency said several patients died and dozens were put at risk during the raid, which brought even further destruction to a hospital that had already largely ceased to function. The heavy fighting showed that Hamas can still put up resistance even in one of the hardest-hit areas of Gaza.

Rear Adm Daniel Hagari, the top military spokesman, said Hamas and the smaller Islamic Jihad group had established their main northern headquarters inside the hospital. He described days of close-quarters fighting inside different buildings, and blamed Hamas for the destruction, saying some fighters had barricaded themselves inside hospital wards while others launched mortar rounds at the compound.

The military has described the raid on Shifa Hospital as one of the most successful operations PHOTO: BBC NEWS

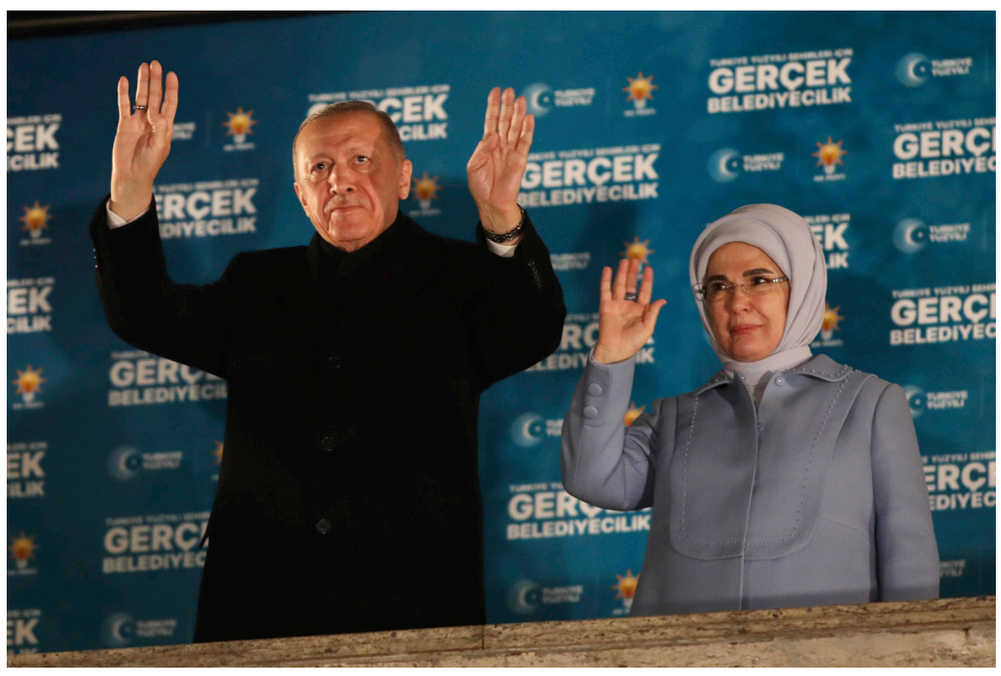
He said the troops had arrested some 900 suspected militants during the raid, including more than 500 Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters, and seized over USD 3 million in different currencies, as well as weapons.

He denied that any civilians had been harmed by Israeli forces, saying the army had evacuated more than 200 of the estimated 300 to 350 patients and delivered food, water and medical supplies to the rest. Mohammed Mahdi, who was among hundreds of Palestinians who returned to the area, described a scene of "total destruction".

He said several buildings had been burned down and that he had counted six bodies in the area, including two in the hospital courtyard. Video footage circulating online showed heavily damaged and charred buildings, mounds of dirt that had been churned up by bulldozers and patients on stretchers in darkened corridors. *—AP*

- UN agency said several patients died and dozens were put at risk during the raid, which brought even further destruction to a hospital that had already largely ceased to function

TURKISH LOCAL ELECTIONS



Turkish President and leader of the Justice and Development Party, or AKP, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and his wife Emine Erdogan gesture to supporters at his party headquarters in Ankara, Turkey on Monday PHOTO: PTI

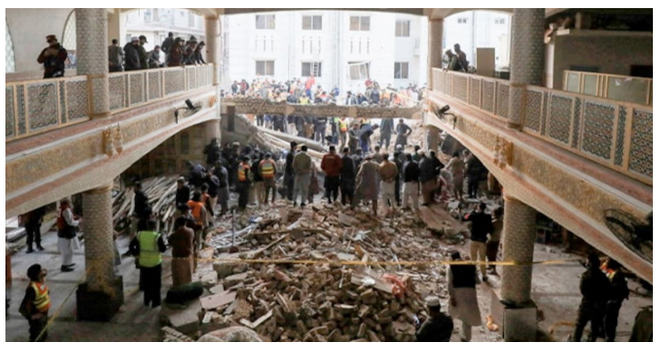
Pak witnessed 245 terror attacks in first quarter of 2024: Think tank

ISLAMABAD, 1 APRIL

Pakistan witnessed as many as 245 incidents of terror attacks and counter-terror operations during the first quarter of 2024, resulting in 432 fatalities and 370 injuries among civilians, security personnel and rebels, according to a think tank report.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan provinces, both bordering Afghanistan, accounted for over 92 per cent of all fatalities and 86 per cent of attacks during this period. Individually, the former suffered 51 per cent and the latter 41 per cent of all fatalities in the first quarter of 2024, according to the security report issued by the Centre for Research and Security Studies. The data indicates that the remaining regions were relatively peaceful, suffering less than 8 per cent of all fatalities. Interestingly, militant organisations claimed responsibility for less than 20 per cent of the total casualties attributed to terrorism in the first quarter of 2024.

A new militant group named Jabhat Ansar al-Mahdi Khorasan, affiliated with the Gul Bahadur group, has emerged. In addition to the casualties of terrorism and counter-terrorism, there were 64 incidents of sabotage in the country targeting properties of the government, politicians, and private and security properties. In the first quarter, Balochistan recorded a staggering 96 per cent surge in violence, with fatalities jumping to 178 from 91 in the last quarter of 2023. *—PTI*



Khyber and Balochistan, accounted for over 92% of all fatalities PHOTO: PTI

Germany partially decriminalises cannabis

FRANKFURT, 1 APRIL

Marijuana campaigners in Germany lit celebratory joints on Monday as the country liberalized rules on cannabis to allow possession of small amounts.

The German Cannabis Association, which campaigned for the new law, staged a "smoke-in" at Berlin's landmark Brandenburg Gate when the law took effect at midnight. Other public consumption events were scheduled throughout the country, including one in front of the Cologne cathedral and others in Hamburg, Regensburg and Dortmund.

The new law legalizes possession by adults of up to 25 grams (nearly 1 ounce) of marijuana for recreational purposes and allows individuals to grow up to three plants on their own.

That part of the legislation took effect Monday.

German residents age 18 and older will be allowed to join nonprofit "cannabis clubs" with a maximum 500 members each starting 1 July.

Individuals will be allowed to buy up to 25 grams per day, or a maximum 50 grams per month — a figure limited to 30 grams for people under age 21. Membership in multiple clubs won't be allowed.

The clubs' costs will be covered by membership fees, which are to be staggered according to how much marijuana members use. The legislation also calls for an amnesty under which sentences for cannabis-related offenses that will no longer be illegal are to be reviewed and in many cases reversed.

Regional authorities worry that the judicial system will be overburdened by thousands of cases. *—AP*

IN YEMEN

Destroyed Houthi drones over Red Sea: US military

The rebels launched a campaign of drone and missile attacks PHOTO: PTI

CAIRO, 1 APRIL

The US military has said its forces destroyed one unmanned aerial vehicle in a Houthi rebel-held area of war-ravaged Yemen and another over a crucial shipping route in the Red Sea. It was the latest development in months of tension between the Iran-backed rebels and the US.

The drones, which were destroyed Saturday morning, posed a threat to US and coalition forces and merchant vessels in the region, the US Central Command said on Sunday. It said that one done was destroyed over the Red Sea, while the second was destroyed on the ground as it was prepared to launch.

"These actions are necessary to protect our forces, ensure freedom of navigation, and make international waters safer and more secure for US, coalition, and merchant vessels," CENTCOM said. There was no comment from the Houthi rebels, which control much of Yemen's north and west.

The rebels launched a campaign of drone and missile attacks on shipping in the Red Sea in November. They have also fired missiles toward Israel, although those have largely fallen short or been intercepted. The rebels have described their campaign as an effort to pressure Israel to end its war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The ships targeted by the Houthis, however, largely have had little or no connection to Israel, the US or other nations involved in the war.

The Houthis have kept up their campaign of attacks despite more than two months of US-led airstrikes. Earlier this month, CENTCOM said its forces also destroyed four unmanned aerial vehicles in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen. It also said Houthis fired four anti-ship ballistic missiles toward the Red Sea, but no injuries or damages were reported by US, coalition or commercial ships. *—AP*

- The drones, which were destroyed Saturday morning, posed a threat to US and coalition forces and merchant vessels in the region, the US Central Command said on Sunday

'Baltimore bridge collapse a nat'l catastrophe'

WASHINGTON, 1 APRIL

Describing the collapse of Francis Scott Key bridge last week as America's "national economic catastrophe", Maryland Governor Wes Moore has said the removal of the wreckage of the bridge and the cargo ship that was mainly manned by an Indian crew is a complex and time-consuming operation. The 2.6km-long, four-lane bridge over the Patapsco River in Baltimore came crashing down after Dali, a 984-foot cargo ship bound for Sri Lanka, collided against it in the early hours of Tuesday. There were eight workers on the bridge at the time. Two survived, two bodies have been found, and four more men are presumed dead.

The 22 crew members from India who have remained on the ship, named the Dali, since the disaster, the New York Times reported. "This is not a Baltimore catastrophe, not a Maryland catastrophe. This is a national economic catastrophe," Moore told CNN in an interview on Sunday.

Moore said this port is one of the busiest, most active ports in the country. "So, this is not just going to have an impact on Maryland. This is going to impact the farmers in Kentucky. This is going to impact the auto dealer in Ohio. This is going to impact the restaurant owner in Tennessee," he said. "Whether you're talking about all those various industries, the Port of Baltimore is the largest in the country for all of those things. So, the reason that we need people to move on a bipartisan basis and move on a fast basis is not because we need you to do Maryland a favour," he said. *—PTI*

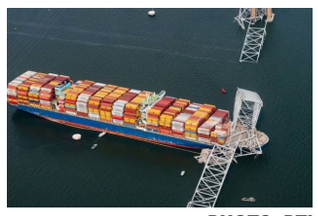


PHOTO: PTI

8 Chinese migrants found dead on Mexico beach

MEXICO CITY, 1 APRIL

The bodies of eight Chinese nationals have been found on a beach in the Mexican state of Oaxaca after their boat capsised, officials say.

The bodies were found on Friday along a route used by illegal migrants trying to reach the United States. The seven women and a man were on board a boat operated by a Mexican that set off from Chiapas state, on the border with Guatemala, on Thursday.

One other person survived. It was not clear what happened the boat's driver. The prosecutor's office in Oaxaca said the bodies were found near a beach in the town of Playa Vicente.

It said it was investigating the cause of the accident and working with the Chinese embassy in Mexico to identify the victims. The number of migrants attempting to enter the US from Mexico has been increasing in recent years.

More than 6.3 million migrants have entered the US illegally since 2021. The number began to rise in 2018, largely driven by Central Americans fleeing a series of complex crises including gang violence, poverty, political repression and natural disasters.

- The prosecutor's office It said it was investigating the cause of the accident and working with the Chinese embassy in Mexico to identify the victims. The number of migrants attempting to enter the US from Mexico has been increasing in recent years

Of migrants from outside the Americas, the greatest increase comes from China, with a growing number looking to escape a faltering economy and political repression at home. More than 37,000 Chinese nationals were detained at the US-Mexico border last year, about 50 times the figure from two years ago.

Mexico's immigration facilities and shelters have been overwhelmed by the rising number of migrants. The country's government has come under increased pressure from the US to fight the flow as illegal immigration takes centre stage in the upcoming US presidential election campaign. *—BBC News*

JINPING'S VISIT

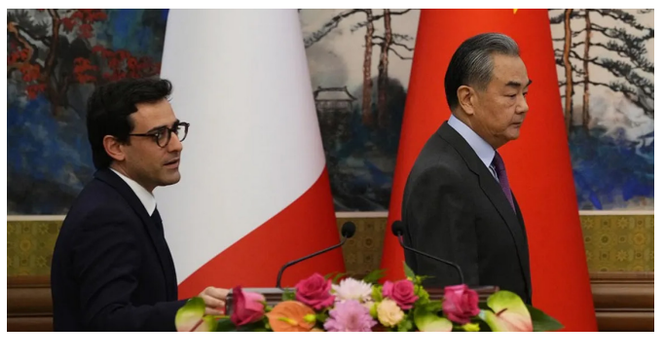
France presses China on trade and Ukraine

BEIJING, 1 APRIL

The French Foreign Minister pressed China on trade issues and the war in Ukraine on Monday ahead of a planned visit to France by Chinese leader Xi Jinping later this spring.

Stéphane Séjourné, in talks with his counterpart Wang Yi in the Chinese capital, largely echoed positions that have been laid out by European leaders, including Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte on a visit to Beijing last week.

"The rebalancing of our economic partnership is a priority, as it is for our European partners," Séjourné said at a joint news conference with Wang. "The European Union is a very open market, the most open in the world. But the current deficits with a certain number of countries, including China, are not sustainable for us."



Officials have expressed concern that a flood of low-priced Chinese-made electric vehicles could disrupt production PHOTO: X/@LESECHOS

European officials have expressed concern that a flood of low-priced Chinese-made electric vehicles could disrupt production and displace jobs in Europe. The EU is investigating whether Chinese government subsidies for EVs give an unfair advantage to Chinese auto exporters. European companies operating in China are complaining that recent changes to national security laws have made it riskier to invest and do business in the country.

On the Chinese side, officials have raised concern about a "de-risking" strategy being pursued by the EU to ensure that it is not overly dependent on any one country for vital supplies and minerals. Wang expressed understanding for the European position but said he hopes it doesn't negatively affect business sentiment.

"I believe the facts have proved and will continue to prove that China constitutes opportunities to Europe, rather than risks," he said. "The two sides are partners not opponents."He also said that China is willing to import more "high-quality French products and services" and is working to resolve the concerns raised by European companies, including restrictions on the transfer of data overseas. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Tata International appoints Rajeev Singhal as MD

MUMBAI, 1 APRIL

Tata Group's global trading and distribution arm, Tata International on Monday announced the appointment of Rajeev Singhal as its Managing Director (MD). Singhal whose appointment to the new position is effective from 1 April, succeeds Anand Sen, who superannuated on 31 March, 2024, Tata International said in a statement. Prior to this, Singhal was Executive Director and Chief Operating Officer (COO) at Tata International. Singhal brings over 36 years of experience to his new position, having transitioned from Tata Steel, where he served in various positions including Vice President for marketing and sales for flat products, according to statement. *—PTI*

Gold surges to all-time high of Rs 68,420/10 gm

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Gold prices surged by Rs 1,070 to hit an all-time high of Rs 68,420 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid a rally in the precious metal in global markets, according to HDFC Securities.

The precious metal had closed at Rs 67,350 per 10 grams in the previous trade. Silver prices also jumped by Rs 1,120 to Rs 78,570 per kg. In the previous trade, it had closed at Rs 77,450 perkg. In futures trade on the MCX, the June contract of gold climbed Rs 978 to Rs 68,679 per 10 grams. The May contract of silver rose by Rs 763 to Rs 75,811 per kg.

In the overseas markets, spot COMEX gold prices climbed as much as USD 2,265.73 per ounce and last quoted at USD 2,257.10 per ounce. —PTI

GST collections hit Rs 1.78 lakh crore in March

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

GST collections in March grew 11.5 per cent to Rs 1.78 lakh crore, buoyed by domestic transactions, the finance ministry said on Monday.

The gross GST collection for the last fiscal (April 2023-March 2024) stood at Rs 20.14 lakh crore, 11.7 per cent higher than the mop-up in the preceding fiscal.

The average monthly gross collection for FY24 stood at Rs 1.68 lakh crore, exceeding Rs 1.5 lakh crore in the preceding fiscal.

The highest-ever GST collection was recorded at Rs 1.87 lakh crore in 2023. GST revenue net of refunds for March 2024 was Rs 1.65 lakh crore, 18.4 per cent higher over the same period a year ago. *—PTI*

RBI: 97.69 pc of Rs 2,000 currency notes returned

New Delhi, 1 April

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday said nearly 97.69 per cent of the Rs 2000 denomination bank notes have returned to the banking system, and only Rs 8,202 crore worth of the withdrawn notes are still with the public.

On 19 May, 2023, RBI announced the withdrawal of Rs 2,000 denomination bank notes from circulation.

The total value of Rs 2000 banknotes in circulation, which was Rs 3.56 lakh crore at the close of business on 19 May, 2023, when the withdrawal of Rs 2000 banknotes was announced, has declined to Rs 8,202 crore at the close of business on 29 March, 2024, the RBI said in a statement.

The Rs 2000 bank notes were introduced in November 2016, following the demonetisation of the then-prevailing Rs 1,000 and Rs 500 bank notes. *—PTI*

Sensex, Nifty hit all-time high in intra-day trading

Markets begin new fiscal on bullish note amid firm trends

MUMBAI, 1 APRIL

Stock markets started the new fiscal on a firm note on Monday with benchmark Sensex and Nifty scaling fresh record high levels in intra-day trade before settling in the green, backed by firm trends in Asian markets and foreign fund inflows.

Extending its winning momentum to the third day in a row, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 363.20 points or 0.49 per cent to settle at 74,014.55. During the day, it zoomed 603.27 points or 0.81 per cent to hit its record intra-day high of 74,254.62.

NSE Nifty climbed 135.10 points or 0.61 per cent to 22,462. During the day, it jumped 203.05 points or 0.90 per cent to hit the all-time peak of 22,529.95.

BSE Sensex jumped 363.20 points to settle at 74,014.55 PHOTO: ANI

- NSE Nifty climbed 135.10 points or 0.61 per cent to 22,462. During the day, it jumped 203.05 points or 0.90 per cent to hit the all-time peak of 22,529.95

From Sensex basket, JSW Steel, Tata Steel, UltraTech Cement, NTPC, Larsen & Toubro and HDFC Bank were the major gainers.

Titan, Nestle, Bharti Airtel and IndusInd Bank were among the laggards.

Metal stocks excelled, owing to the swift pace of Chinese PMI data, indicating traction in the economic recovery, Nair added.

Among Asian markets, Seoul and Shanghai settled in the green while Tokyo ended lower. Wall Street ended on a mixed note on Thursday.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 188.31 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.10 per cent to USD 86.91 a barrel. *—PTI*

EFFECTIVE FROM 1 APRIL

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitaraman PHOTO: ANI

Centre says no new changes in income tax regime

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Finance ministry on Monday said there is no change in the new income tax regime for individuals for the current fiscal year and individual taxpayers can opt out of the regime at the time of filing their ITR.

A modified new income tax regime was rolled out from the financial year beginning 1 April, 2023, for individuals under which the tax rates are "significantly lower".

However, the benefit of various exemptions and deductions (other than standard deduction of Rs 50,000 from salary and Rs 15,000 from family pension) is not available, as in the old regime.

"New tax regime is the default tax regime. However, tax payers can choose the tax regime (old or new) that they think is beneficial to them. Option for opting out from the new tax regime is available till filing of return for the AY 2024-25," it said.

Under the new IT regime, income of up to Rs 3 lakh is exempt from tax. A 5 per cent tax is levied on income between Rs 3-6 lakh, 10 per cent for income between Rs 6-9 lakh.

Income between Rs 9-12 lakh and Rs 12-15 lakh is subject to 15 per cent and 20 per cent tax, respectively. A 30 per cent I-T would be applicable on income above Rs 15 lakh.

The new tax regime was set as "a default regime" from 2023-24 and the Assessment Year corresponding to this is AY 2024-25. This can be changed by the taxpayer at the time of filing Income Tax Returns (ITR) by an individual.Eligible persons without any business income will have the option to choose the regime for each financial year. The old tax regime which is still in force and offers a host of deductions and exemptions, exempts income up to Rs 2.5 lakh from taxes. Income from Rs 2.5-5 lakh attracts 5 per cent tax, and 20 per cent for income between Rs 5 lakh and Rs 10 lakh. A 30 per cent tax is levied on income above Rs 10 lakh. *—PTI*

> **New tax regime is the default tax regime. However, tax payers can choose the tax regime (old or new) that they think is beneficial to them. Option for opting out from the new tax regime is available till filing of return for the AY 2024-25**
> -Finance Ministry

COAL PRODUCTION HITS 1 BN TONNES: PRALHAD JOSHI

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

India's output of coal and lignite crossed one billion tonnes (BT), on 22 March, a historic achievement, said Pralhad Joshi, Minister of Coal, Mines & Parliamentary Affairs.

During the current fiscal year, 2023–24, India has surpassed previous year's output of 937.22 million tonnes (MT) of coal and lignite by a margin of 25 days. In addition, India has a sizeable coal reserve at the moment, with coal firms holding about 96 MT of coal.

The accomplishment of India in breaking the 1 BT mark in coal and lignite output enhances the nation's energy security and lessens its need on coal imports, resulting in significant savings in foreign exchange reserves, the official statement said. *—PTI*

Power consumption rises 1.4 pc to 129.8 billion units in March

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

India's power consumption growth remained subdued at 1.4 per cent to 129.89 billion units (BU) in March as compared to the year-ago period mainly due to pleasant weather. In March 2023, it stood at 128.12 BU, lower than 128.47 BU recorded in the same month a year earlier.

The highest supply in a day (peak power demand) rose to 221.70 GW in March 2024 as opposed to 208.92 GW in March 2023 and 199.43 GW in March 2022.

Experts said power consumption as well as demand growth remained subdued in March as the weather remained pleasant across the country and people did not feel the need for heating or cooling appliances, especially in North India.

PHOTO: X/ @MalcolmInfiniti

- The highest supply in a day (peak power demand) rose to 221.70 GW in March 2024 as opposed to 208.92 GW in March 2023 and 199.43 GW in March 2022

It has estimated around 260 GW of peak demand during summer.

The experts said power demand as well as consumption will see robust growth April onwards with the onset of summer.

Ministry had estimated the country's electricity demand to touch 229 GW during summer in 2023, but it did not reach the projected level in April-July due to unseasonal rainfall.

Peak supply, however, touched a new high of 224.1 GW in June before dropping to 209.03 GW in July.

Peak demand touched 238.82 GW in August 2023, while it was 243.27 GW in September, 222.16 GW in October, 204.77 GW in November, 213.79 GW in July.

Industry experts said power consumption was affected in March, April, May, and June in 2023 due to widespread rainfall. *—PTI*

Commercial LPG to now cost Rs 30.5 cheaper

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Jet fuel or ATF price on Monday was cut by a marginal 0.5 per cent while rates of commercial LPG used by establishments such as hotels and restaurants were slashed by Rs 31 per cylinder in line with international prices.

Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price was cut by Rs 502.91 per kilolitre (kl) or 0.49 per cent, to Rs 100,893.63 per kl in the national capital, according to a price notification of state-owned fuel retailers.

Rates in Mumbai have been cut to Rs 94,466.41 per kl from Rs 94,809.22.

Alongside, oil firms also cut the price of commercial LPG by Rs 30.5 to Rs 1,764.50 per 19-kg cylinder.

Rates of the cooking gas used in domestic households however remained unchanged at Rs 803 per 14.2kg cylinder.

This is the first reduction in commercial LPG prices since January. Rates had gone up Rs 14 per cylinder on 1 February and Rs 25.5 on 1 March.

PHOTO: ANI

Also, the price of the 5 kg Free Trade LPG or market priced cooking gas cylinder has been lowered by Rs 7.50.

State-owned Indian Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd, and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd revise prices of ATF and cooking gas on 1st of every month based on the average price of benchmark international fuel and foreign exchange rate. *—PTI*

RBI focussed on stable and strong financial system, says Governor

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das on Monday said the endeavour of the central bank would be to provide a stable and strong financial system over the next decade, which will act as the bedrock for the country's economic progress.

Over the years, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has emerged as a symbol of stability, resilience and commitment to the welfare of our citizens, he said at an event to mark the 90th anniversary of RBI.

"As we move towards RBI at 100, Reserve Bank remains focussed on a stable and strong financial system that would act as the bedrock for our country's economic progress," he said.

Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das PHOTO: ANI

Das highlighted that Reserve Bank's evolution as an institution has been closely intertwined with the development of the Indian economy.

"We are a full-service central bank with our functions spanning multiple dimensions. It has been our endeavour to promote a financial sector that is robust, resilient, and future-ready," he said.

Talking about structural reforms, he said, the enactment of the Insolvenc and the adoption of flexible inflation targeting in recent years, have helped to deal with the challenges in the banking system and the task of maintaining price stability effectively. Highlighting the importance of creating a balance between inflation control and growth for any developing country, he expressed confidence that the RBI can become a model and play a leadership role in the world, supporting the entire Global South. Steps like active price monitoring and fiscal consolidation kept inflation even during difficult times of the Covid pandemic RBI's has contributed a major role in the progress of the economy. *—PTI*

HAL REVENUE UP BY 11% AT RS 29,810 CR

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited on Monday said that it has recorded revenue from operations of over Rs 29,810 crore for 2023-24 growing at 11 per cent as against nine per cent in the previous fiscal. The corresponding figure for previous year was Rs 26,928 crore, Bengaluru-headquartered defence PSU said.

HAL Chairman and Managing Director (Additional Charge), CB Ananthakrishnan said that despite major supply chain challenges arising due to geopolitical issues, the company has met the expected revenue growth with improved performance for the entire year.

"The company's order book stands in excess of Rs 94,000 crore with additional major orders expected during 2024-25," Ananthakrishnan said.

HAL received fresh manufacturing contracts of over Rs 19,000 crore and Repair and Overhaul (ROH) contracts of over Rs 16,000 crore during 2023-24. An export contract with Guyana Defence Forces for supply of two Hindustan-228 aircraft was signed during 2023-24.A milestone was achieved with the first production series fighter of LCA Mk1A completing its maiden flight. *—PTI*

Govt re-imposes import ban on solar modules

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

The government has re-imposed restrictions on import of solar modules. The move was taken to boost local manufacturing. Imports were allowed till 31 March on the basis of industry demand and the fact that not enough domestic manufacturers are there to meet the demand.

It had earlier exempted solar projects commissioned by March 31, from the mandatory requirement of procuring solar modules from the approved list of models and manufacturers for 2023-24.

Government mandate of 2021 says, solar project developers will have to buy modules from the approved list as a non-tariff barrier to boost domestic manufacturing.

The government is now bringing back the order as it is of the view that domestic capacities are now ready to meet the demand and need to be supported, said a government official.

Government believes domestic manufacturing capacities are projected to grow significantly by 2026

Earlier in February, the government had said that while the approved list of model manufacturers, restriction would restart from 1 April.

- India's cumulative solar module manufacturing capacity has reached 64.5GW, and solar cell manufacturing capacity totalled 5.8GW

However, open access and captive consumption projects would be exempt. Exemption was also given to projects in the advanced stage of construction and had opened a line of credit or placed orders before March end for modules.

According to Mercom India research, as on December 2023, India's cumulative solar module manufacturing capacity has reached 64.5GW, and solar cell manufacturing capacity totalled 5.8GW.

Mercom India report says India's domestic module manufacturing capacity is projected to surpass 150GW, and cell manufacturing capacity is expected to reach 75GW by 2026. *—ANI*

All Adani group stocks in high demand

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

All listed Adani group stocks were in the limelight on Monday, with Adani Energy climbing over 8 per cent, as investors flocked to the counters amid a positive trend in the broader market.

Shares of Adani Energy Solutions jumped 8.40 per cent, NDTV zoomed 6.16 per cent, Adani Wilmar advanced 5.92 per cent, Adani Power surged 4.99 per cent, Adani Total Gas soared 4.81 per cent, Adani Green Energy rallied 2.93 per cent, Adani Ports climbed 2.56 per cent and ACC (2.38 per cent) on the BSE. The stock of Adani Enterprises went up by 1.80 per cent and Ambuja Cements climbed 1.49 per cent. The combined market valuation of firms stood at Rs 16,30,648.23 crore. *—PTI*

NEW TOLL SYSTEM

'1 vehicle, 1 FASTag' comes into force

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

State-owned National Highways Authority of India's 'One Vehicle, One FASTag' norm, which aims to discourage the use of single FASTag for multiple vehicles or linking multiple FASTags to a particular vehicle, has come into force from Monday, a senior official said.

NHAI had extended 'One Vehicle, One FASTag' initiative compliance deadline to March-end, in view of the problems being faced by Paytm FASTag users.

"Multiple FASTags won't work... People who have multiple FASTags for one vehicle won't be able to use all of them from 1 April," the official said. in a statement.

FASTag has changed toll collection system PHOTO: X/ @NBirenSingh

To enhance the efficiency of the electronic toll collection system and provide seamless movement at toll plazas, NHAI has taken the 'One Vehicle, One FASTag' initiative that aims to discourage the use of single FASTag for multiple vehicles or linking multiple FASTags to a particular vehicle.

Last month, Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had advised customers as well as merchants of Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) to shift their accounts to other banks by 15 March.

With a penetration rate of around 98 per cent and over 8 crore users, FASTag has revolutionised the electronic toll collection system in the country. *—PTI*

Faltering RCB to eye collective improvement

Lucknow Super Giants will monitor Rahul's fitness

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

An inconsistent Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) would be eager to hit the turn-around button when they host Lucknow Super Giants, who will keep an eye on regular skipper KL Rahul's fitness, in the IPL here on Tuesday.

The RCB are currently eighth on the table with two points from three matches, and alarmingly, their net run rate too has dipped to -0.71 after a heavy defeat against Kolkata Knight Riders here last week.

This is not to undermine the side under Faf du Plessis, who himself is struggling for big runs, but its ability to dish out consistent cricket is a matter of debate at this point. Several reasons are there for that overbearing feeling. It starts with the RCB batting line-up in which Virat Kohli is the only constant with two fifties from three matches.

But Du Plessis, Glenn Maxwell, Rajat Patidar and Cameron Green, who constitute the cream of RCB's top and middle-order, have so far made up for a faltering coalition. The quartet's collective returns from three matches stand at – Du Plessis (46, Avg: 15.33), Maxwell (31, Avg: 10.33), Green (54, Avg: 18) and Patidar (21, Avg: 7), and terming them underwhelming is an understatement. It meant that RCB had to often rely on their late-order batters like Dinesh Karthik, Anuj Rawat and Mahipal Lomror to add meat to the total. In that context, the RCB might give a break to Patidar for this game and bring in someone like Suyash Prabhudessai, who can also roll his arm for an over or two.

The senior batters' struggles have percolated to their bowling department too. Mohammed Siraj offers the most glaring example. The lead pacer has taken just two wickets in three matches, conceding 10 runs an over and he needs to step up immediately.

Siraj's lack of bite has robbed RCB of a chance to take some early wickets in the Power Play and put the Opposition under pressure, something he had done quite consistently during IPL 2023. The situation has turned even grimmer as Siraj's new-ball partner Alzarri Joseph, RCB's Rs 11.5 crore buy in the auction, has been totally rudderless, taking a solitary wicket and leaking 9.4 runs per over. —*PTI*

Royal Challenger Bengalur's top order batsman Virat Kohli discussing strategy with the team head coach Andy Flower **PHOTO: X/@RCB**

Djokovic to become oldest World No 1 in ATP rankings history

LONDON, 1 APRIL

The 24-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic continued to rack up records on the ATP Tour as he began the week 419 as World No 1 extending his huge record. He also will become the oldest World No 1 ever this Sunday. The Serbian will surpass Roger Federer's record as the oldest No 1 in ATP Rankings history on Sunday when he will be 36 years and 321 days old. Djokovic, one of the greatest players of all time, has proven near-unrivalled longevity at the pinnacle of his sport even as he enters his fourth decade. Since turning 30 on May 22, 2017, the Serbian has won 31 tour-level titles, including 12 of his 24 Grand Slams, 10 of his 40 ATP Masters 1000 victories, and two of his seven ATP Finals triumphs. —*ANI*

Advani outwits Causier to retain CCI billiards crown

MUMBAI, 1 APRIL

World champion Pankaj Advani continued his impressive run as he thrashed Englishman David Causier 1836-743 in a lop-sided final to retain the All India CCI Billiards Classic title here on Monday. Advani was in outstanding form as he constructed two humungous breaks of 801 and 460 to outwit Causier, a former 10-time World champion, in the four-hour summit clash played at the CCI's Wilson Jones billiards hall. At the end of the first two-hour session, Advani enjoyed a slender lead of 593-570 and was on a break of 204, which he converted to a 460. This was Advani's fourth successive triumph at this venue. He claimed the CCI Snooker Classic over the last two years and now retained the billiards title. —*PTI*

PCB chairman to hold talks with Shaheen Afridi

LAHORE, 1 APRIL

Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Mohsin Naqvi is set to hold talks with Shaheen Shah Afridi over the star pacer's remarks released in a PCB statement regarding the recent captaincy changes in the 'Men in Green', according to GeoNews on Monday. On Sunday, PCB reinstated Babar Azam as the captain of the white-ball format ahead of the upcoming T20 World Cup 2024, which is slated to begin on 1 June in the USA and the West Indies. PCB released a statement to announce Babar as the skipper of the Pakistan men's team. The statement also included Afridi's quotes, which stated that it was his "duty" to back Babar. "It was an absolute honour to captain the Pakistan National Cricket Team," PCB said. —*ANI*

Sumit Nagal attains career-high ATP ranking of 95

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Ace Indian tennis player Sumit Nagal on Monday achieved a career-high ranking of 95 in the ATP singles chart, following impressive results in recent times. His previous best was 97 in February, which he had attained after winning the Chennai Open, an ATP Challenger series event. Nagal made headlines in January after he made it to the main draw of the Australian Open and also became the first Indian to beat a seeded player (AlexanderBublik of Kazakhstan) in the same before bowing out in the second round after losing to Shang Juncheng of China. —*PTI*

RR beat Mumbai by 6 wickets

MUMBAI, 1 APRIL

Rajasthan Royals defeated Mumbai Indians by six wickets to register their third consecutive win in this edition of the IPL here on Monday. Opting to bowl first, Rajasthan Royals stopped Mumbai Indians at 125 for nine and then chased down the target with 27 balls to spare. The in-form Riyan Parag again played very well to remain not out on 54 off 39 balls. MI were off to a disas-

Pant fined ₹12 lakh for slow over rate

VISAKHAPATNAM, 1 APRIL

Delhi Capitals skipper Rishabh Pant has copped a Rs 12 lakh fine for maintaining a slow over rate during the IPL game against Chennai Super Kings here. Delhi Capitals pulled off a comfortable 20-run win over CSK here. "The Delhi Capitals captain, has been fined after his team maintained a slow over rate during their match," statement read. —*PTI*

BCCI invites IPL owners on 16 Apr

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has invited owners of the 10 IPL teams for an informal meeting in Ahmedabad on 16 April. The meeting will take place on the sidelines of the game between Delhi Capitals and Gujarat Titans at the Narendra Modi Stadium. "The IPL owners have been invited for an informal meeting. There is no set agenda. —*PTI*

TODAY'S MATCH

RCB vs LUCKNOW SUPER GIANTS

Time: 7.30 pm

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Chinnaswamy Stadium, Bengaluru

Hockey india had promised a revamp of the national camp **PHOTO: PTI**

Women's hockey team get old and new faces

BENGALURU, 1 APRIL

Veterans like goalkeeper Savita Punia and forward Vandana Katariya made the cut among a host of new faces in Hockey India's jumbo assessment squad of 60 for a seven-day camp starting Monday, at the end of which trials to pick 33 national probables would be conducted.

The assessment camp will be held at the Sports Authority of India centre here and selection trials to prune down the squad to 33 for future coaching camps and international exposure tours will be conducted on the 6 and 7 April.

"The 60-player core group has been shortlisted following the stellar performances at the recently concluded 14th Hockey India Senior Women's National Championship in Pune," Hockey India said in a statement. Hockey india had promised a revamp of the national camp after the team's failure to make the cut for Paris Olympics despite being the hosts of the qualifying tournament earlier this year.

"This selection identifies promising talent from across various states based on their impressive performances throughout the tournament," the HI stated. "These players will now be closely monitored as they vie for a spot in the final 33-member core probables for the Indian Women's Hockey Team," it added. —*PTI*

MADRID WIN 8 POINTS TO GO CLEAR AT TOP

MADRID, 1 APRIL

Real Madrid's final match before facing Manchester City in the Champions League ended in victory over Athletic Bilbao thanks to two fine goals by Rodrygo.

The Brazil forward opened the scoring with a lovely finish from 20 yards. And he made sure of the points with a composed finish after a mazy run. Real Madrid, who welcomed back England midfielder Jude Bellingham from suspension, are eight points clear of Barcelona at the top of La Liga with eight games remaining. The hosts could have won by more but Federico Valverde was denied by keeper Julen Agirrezabala and Brahim Diaz hit the post after Aurelien Tchouameni headed another chance narrowly wide. Athletic Bilbao, who face Mallorca in the final of the Copa del Rey in Seville on Saturday (21:00 BST), were denied an equaliser at 1-0 when Inaki Williams' attempt was kept out by Andriy Lunin.

They stay fourth in the table, one point ahead of fifth-placed Atletico Madrid. On a positive night for Real, Brazil defender Eder Militao made his first appearance since 12 August after serious injury when he came on as a substitute in the 92nd minute. —*BBC News*

Mirabai Chanu lifted a total of 184kg (81kg+103kg) at the tournament **PHOTO: X/ @OLYMPICS KHEL**

Mirabai finishes 3rd in group B of WC, qualifies for Olympics

PHUKET, 1 APRIL

Tokyo Olympics silver-medallist Mirabai Chanu all but qualified for the 2024 Paris Games after she finished third in the women's 49kg Group B event of the IWF World Cup here on Monday.

Returning from a six-month injury lay off, Chanu lifted a total of 184kg (81kg+103kg) at the tournament, which is the final and a mandatory qualifier for the Paris Olympics. With the completion of her event, Chanu has fulfilled the criteria for the Paris Olympics, which is participating in two compulsory events and three other qualifiers.

The 2017 world champion is currently ranked second in the women's 49kg Olympic Qualification Ranking (OQR) behind China's Jian HuiHua.

The official announcement for the qualification will come after the conclusion of the World Cup when the OQR will be updated.

The top 10 lifters from each weight class will qualify for the Paris Olympics.

Chanu, who last competed at the Asian Games in September where she suffered a hip tendonitis injury, was not at her best, but was able to make five clean lifts.

Her lifts in the snatch and clean and jerk sections were nowhere close to her personal best efforts. —*PTI*

CANDIDATES CHESS TITLE

Indians are a long shot in, says Anand

NEW DELHI, 1 APRIL

Giving prominence to experience over youthful exuberance, five-time world champion Viswanathan Anand feels the three Indian participants remain far from winning the Candidates chess title, saying they "should first settle into the tournament."

The tournament, which will determine the challenger for the next World Championship, will be held in Toronto from 3-22 April. The immensely talented R Praggnanandhaa, D Gukesh and Vidit Gujrathi are the three Indians competing in the meet's open category.

"The Indians are a long shot. If they can keep the tournament going that's good enough. If a late opportunity presents itself, they can grab it. They should first settle into the tournament and try to play good games. Let the big decisions come later," said Anand in a webcast published on a popular chess portal.

Viswanathan Anand **PHOTO: PTI**

And it is only the first time that all the three have qualified and Anand singled out Gujrathi as someone who could fit on both sides - being experienced as well as a debutante. The opinion is not much divided among the world elite as Anand also felt, like many others, that Fabiano Caruana and Hikaru Nakamura of the United States are the clear favourites while terming Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia and Alireja Firouza of France as the unpredictable players of the tournament. —*PTI*

ISL: Pb eyeing playoff spot with win against Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, 1 APRIL

Punjab FC will take on Odisha FC in a crucial encounter to leap ahead in the playoff race in the Indian Super League. The game will take place at Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar.

PFC shared points with FC Goa in their previous match in a six-goal thriller in New Delhi before the international break. On the other hand, Odisha FC played out a goalless draw against Bengaluru FC in their last encounter in the league. Speaking at the pre-match press conference, Punjab FC's head coach, Staikos Vergetis, said that the break was crucial for them as the players could take rest. He added that his side is prepared to take on Odisha FC in their upcoming match. "The break was important not only for us but all the teams as we had some consecutive matches and it has allowed the players to have a proper rest. We have an important game coming up tomorrow against a very strong Odisha side who play very good effective football. They know when to attack and when to defend appropriately. We have improved a lot as a team and as a coach, I am lucky to have this bunch of players. We have prepared ourselves well for tomorrow's match and we hope to get a positive result out of it," Vergetis was quoted in a release from Punjab FC as saying. —*ANI*